

An Examination of Instructional Coaching and Teacher Retention: A Case Study

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A dissertation submitted to the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department of the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate in Education
in K – 12 Professional Leadership

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University of Houston
December 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the support and guidance of many university professionals who assisted me in my journey. First and foremost, I must thank the members of my cohort as we were the first to make the journey together at UHSL. Fab Five, thank you for providing me with knowledge and support so I could grow in my career. Dr. Lynn Gillman-Rich, thank you for sharing your qualitative expertise with me and igniting a passion for research through your courses. You are a model for the professional I aspire to be in the future. Dr. Bradley Carpenter, thank you for your unending enthusiasm for my research and flexibility along the way. Finally, my committee chair Dr. Keith Butcher, thank you does not seem profound enough to express my gratitude. Thank you for being available whenever I needed a listening ear. Most importantly, thank you for being my biggest advocate.

Several professionals outside of the university must be acknowledged as well. Dr. Jonathan Maxwell, thank you for your encouragement before and during this program. Carla Patton, thank you for your flexibility and unwavering support as I navigated this process while assisting you in leading your campus as well. Marisa Guzman, thank you for inspiring me to study instructional coaches and demonstrating the powerful impact an instructional coach can have. I am also incredibly grateful to the employees of Star Elementary who allowed me to borrow their time to further my research. Without you, this is not possible.

ABSTRACT

Background: Teacher retention remains a crisis nationally. While a variety of interventions have sought to curtail the number of teachers exiting the field each year, districts continue to lose high-quality teachers at an increasingly staggering rate. Interventions notwithstanding, nearly 30% of early career teachers leave the field after solely one year in the classroom. High teacher attrition rates result in negative consequences such as loss of district funds and low student achievement (Barnes, Crow & Schaefer, 2007; Carroll & Foster, 2010). This qualitative case study focused on one Title I elementary campus in a suburban school district, specifically three first- and second-year teachers, one instructional coach and the campus principal, and sought to document the factors behind the teachers' decision to remain on staff at their campus. **Purpose:** The study examined the impact of having direct support from an instructional coach on the retention of early career teachers. To guarantee its purpose was comprehensively addressed, the following research questions navigated the extent of this study: (1) How would you describe the impact of having direct support from an instructional coach on the retention of early career teachers? (1a) How important is the effectiveness of an instructional coach on the retention of early career teachers? (1b) How do participants describe the instructional coaching model and its role in teacher retention? **Methods:** Each educator participated in semi-structured interviews. The classroom teachers participated in two separate interviews totaling approximately 50 minutes. The instructional coach and campus principal participated in one interview, ranging from 20 to 30 minutes. The elementary campus acted as the bounded system and the participants provided further insight into the operation in terms of retention of early career teachers. Interviews were audiotaped to ensure accuracy and later transcribed and coded following Bhattacharya's and Tesch's methods (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2014). Upon completion of the interview, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to the campus teachers to allow for extended responses regarding their experiences with an instructional coach. To triangulate the data and further describe the setting, campus and district data focusing on academic performance, student profile, and campus culture were also analyzed in addition to data on teacher retention. **Results:** Participants shared that their professional relationship with an instructional coach largely impacted their decision to remain at their current campus. Participants also noted that whereas they appreciated a personal relationship with their instructional coach, the coach's effectiveness held more importance to them in their role as a classroom teacher. Participants also communicated that the chosen instructional model employed at the campus level affected their capacity as an educator; therefore, the elected model played a role in their retention. **Conclusion:** This research study shows that effective instructional coaching can be utilized as an intervention to curb teacher attrition. District and campus leaders can initiate practices to increase the effectiveness of instructional coaches as a means to increase teacher capacity and retention.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background of the Study

As members of society, we are aware that quality education is necessary for all children who walk through the doors of a school building. However, in order to deliver quality education, a school must have quality educators. Low teacher retention rates tremendously impact the number of quality educators that districts are able to staff (Norton, 1999). This is especially true for areas with a high population of economically disadvantaged students (Murnane, 2007). As a former elementary teacher and current curriculum specialist in a large school district in a suburban area, I have seen firsthand how quickly promising educators leave the profession for a myriad of reasons. I chose to conduct this study to determine if there is a relationship between direct support from an effective instructional coach and the retention rates of first- and second-year teachers, specifically at a Title I campus.

This qualitative case study focused on a Title I campus in a large suburban district and studied first- and second-year teachers' reasons for continuing to work at their campus in spite of the workplace's shortcomings. The teachers' reasons for continuing at their current job placement as opposed to transferring to another campus or another profession entirely were closely examined. Throughout the data analysis, I sought to identify if an effective instructional coach was instrumental in the teachers' decision-making.

Background of the Problem

Teacher retention has been and continues to be a prevailing issue in the field of education. Teachers, specifically first- and second-year teachers, are leaving the profession at an

alarming rate. With 25% of teachers leaving the profession after their first year and only 50% of teachers continuing to teach after five years, the crisis is evident (Norton, 1999). High teacher turnover has led to adverse effects in school districts, namely the loss of district's financial resources (Barnes, Crow & Schaefer, 2007; Troutt, 2014) and a decrease in student achievement (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011; Carroll & Foster, 2010; Coggins & Peske, 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Troutt, 2014). This widespread epidemic has created such a void in the field of education that, according to Winnail and Bartee (2002), the "attraction and retention of quality teachers" is among superintendents' top 10 concerns (p. 410).

Teachers are electing to leave the profession for a multitude of reasons. These reasons can be effectively summarized as a lack of support for new teachers. Research spanning decades has identified a lack of administrative support as a strong reason teachers choose to leave the field (Coggins & Peske, 2011; Esch, 2010; Howder, 2013; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In addition, teachers have also credited a lack of professional development as a reason they felt unsupported (Boyd et al., 2011; Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008; Troutt, 2014). If teachers do not feel supported in their mission to best serve our nation's children, they are unable to perform their duties to the best of their abilities. Many induction and mentoring programs lack consistency and stability, another aspect of teaching that educators fault for their choice to leave the profession (Berry, 2005; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Knight et al., 2015; Long, 2009; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Strong & Baron, 2004; Troutt, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, B. & Tschannen-Moran, M., 2011). The lack of support for first- and second-year teachers manifests itself in low teacher retention. This lack of support is further exacerbated in Title I schools, especially those that are considered consistently low-performing, where the shortage of qualified teachers is considered

“severe” (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003, p. 99). Historically, students living in poverty attend low-achieving schools characterized by inadequate resources and poorly skilled teachers (Murnane, 2007).

Faced with a teacher retention crisis, districts have attempted to resolve this issue by implementing a variety of strategies. Strong administrative support is key to retaining quality teachers in the profession (Boyd et al., 2011). A strong administrator will not only grow a teacher in the classroom environment but will empower a teacher to go beyond the walls of a classroom to have a positive effect on students at a larger scale. Districts have also attempted to address the retention crisis by increasing the effectiveness of the professional development opportunities they offer to teachers (Murnane, 2007). Equipped with effective teaching strategies and current best practices, teachers will feel better prepared to help their students gain a deeper understanding of the content. Another retention intervention districts have implemented is establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on their campuses. PLCs have been designed so that teachers can learn from each other and create a network of supportive professionals to find commonalities regarding best approaches to student success through action research (DuFour & DuFour, 2013). Induction programs are another strategy districts have employed to address the teacher retention crisis. These induction programs focus on creating a bridge from “student of teaching” to “teacher of students” (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Some districts have also initiated an incentivized pay system in which teachers receive a bonus of sorts if they elect to teach at consistently low-performing schools as identified by a school district (Berry, 2005). In an attempt to recruit passionate, highly-qualified educators, districts have also revamped their recruitment and selection strategies to attract professionals who districts believe

will be more willing to remain in the field due to being nontraditional candidates (Quartz, K.H. & TEP Research Group, 2003). Lastly, in order to increase teacher retention, school districts have implemented an instructional coaching model on their campuses. New teachers look to instructional coaches to provide personal guidance based on their own successful experiences (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Due to the potential influence that instructional coaches wield in regards to new teachers, one can reasonably deduce that instructional coaches are likely key factors in a teacher's career decision. Long (2009) found that instructional coaches encourage first- and second-year teachers to enhance their confidence and become reflective thinkers. Given the research, this study focused on the impact, if any, direct support from an effective instructional coach had on the retention of first- and second-year teachers.

Instructional coaches began to draw researchers' attention in the early 2000s. Instructional coaching takes various forms on a campus according to the campus's needs. Research on instructional coaches has focused on effective methods, such as the work of Jim Knight and Elena Aguilar (Aguilar, 2013; Knight et al., 2015). The interactions between instructional coaches and other campus staff have also been studied in addition to campus faculty members' perceptions of the instructional coach's roles (Dole, 2004; Howder, 2013; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, B., & Tschannen-Moran, M., 2011; Wong, H.K., 2004). The most effective forms of instructional coaching encompass a coaching cycle in which instructional coaches and teachers collaborate to identify teacher needs, learn necessary skills and lastly, improve teachers professionally (Knight et al., 2015). Research has shown that effective instructional coaches must have a high level of expertise in order to build capacity in teachers

(Dole, 2004). Quality instructional coaches can reduce the trials that novice teachers experience when entering the profession; this, in turn, forges a strong bond between the instructional coach as a mentor and the teacher as a mentee, promoting job satisfaction for the teacher in spite of common challenges (Wong, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The foundation of education is to support our nation's children in becoming critical thinkers and contributing citizens. One of the primary roadblocks that stands in the way of providing a quality education to our students today is the rapid exodus of teachers from the profession. After one year of teaching, nearly 25% of first-year teachers choose a different career (Carroll & Foster, 2010). This crisis is further exacerbated in Title I schools that serve poor and minority students due to several factors that are common in consistently low-performing schools: an unsupportive administration, inadequate facilities, and few community supports (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). In order to stem the flow of teachers seeking other careers, several remedies have been put into place by school districts. High-quality administrators have been aggressively sought after to turn around campuses in need (Boyd et al., 2011). In addition, districts have attempted to implement interventions such as effective professional development opportunities, PLCs to maximize teacher capacity, induction programs to create a multicultural teacher, incentivized pay, recruitment strategies to encourage non-traditional candidates, and the implementation of the position of instructional coaches to build teacher efficacy (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Murnane, 2007; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Troutt, 2014). Whereas districts have poured their human and financial resources into retaining quality teachers to best serve their students, the issue of teacher retention remains. In short, quality educators are leaving

the field of education to pursue other opportunities for a multitude of reasons. I believe the relationship between direct support from an effective instructional coach and first- and second-year teachers needs to be further examined as a way to increase the retention of beginning teachers, specifically in Title I schools serving at-risk populations.

Purpose of the Study

Due to the teacher retention crisis plaguing schools today and consequently inhibiting students' access to a quality education, I investigated the relationship between first- and second-year teachers and direct support from an effective instructional coach to determine what impact, if any, the support had on teacher retention. I focused my research on Star Elementary (pseudonym), a Title I campus in a large suburban district in Texas. In the 2018-2019 school year, Star Elementary had three first- or second year teachers who elected to stay at the campus in spite of issues similar to those mentioned previously. The district as a whole, according to the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), had been plagued by elevated teacher turnover for nearly a decade. The fact that novice teachers chose to stay after their experiences in the 2018-2019 school year compelled me to study their reasons for continuing in the profession when so many others in their district elected to leave.

The purpose of this study was to examine the specific reasons that led these beginning teachers to continue teaching at Star Elementary. Data was collected through a series of interviews with the novice teachers. It is my hope that this research will add to the literature regarding instructional coaches' impact on teacher retention, specifically in Title I campuses.

Significance of the Study

This study closely analyzed the relationship between the work of an instructional coach in a Title I campus and the retention of beginning teachers. It is known that teachers new to the profession are finding alternate careers in droves, as approximately 30% of first-year teachers elect to choose a different career (Carroll & Foster, 2010). Several practices and procedures have been put into place in order to increase teacher retention. However, these efforts have not shown much success. This study intended to shed light on the impact of an instructional coach on retaining quality teachers. This study adds to the body of literature regarding instructional coaches by filling an identified void of instructional coaches' impact on teacher retention for those early in their careers. It is my hope that districts will refer to this body of research in the future to determine whether employing instructional coaches is essential to address issues regarding teacher retention.

Researcher Perspective

The role of instructional coaches is one that I hold in especially high regard. Throughout my years as a classroom mathematics teacher, I worked alongside an instructional coach who acted not only as a mentor but as a confidante, content expert, and professional model. The knowledge I gained from her coaching methods equipped me with the tools necessary to become an expert in my craft and improve my teaching skills. In addition, I also felt better prepared to analyze my progress throughout the school year because she had created a supportive, safe environment for me to learn and grow as a professional. However, I have had experiences with instructional coaches on the opposite end of the spectrum as well. Because I felt, at the time, that my instructional coach was ineffective, as a new teacher, I sought outside mentors and taught

myself best practices through inquiries, reading through research and attending many professional development trainings. Much like the common shortcomings of campuses that lead teachers to find employment elsewhere, my ineffective instructional coach played a large part in the reason I sought other employment opportunities.

In my personal experience, instructional coaches have held a pivotal role in my job satisfaction. I also have had first-hand experience with high teacher turnover and the negative impacts it can have on a campus as the remaining teachers rally to find replacements and fill in knowledge gaps of first- and second-year teachers.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine first- and second-year teachers' motivations for continuing at their current campus, Star Elementary, although the campus had several shortcomings that mirror common factors teachers cite for leaving the profession. The interview data was collected to answer the research questions below:

1. How would you describe the impact of having direct support from an instructional coach on the retention of beginning teachers?
 - 1a. How important is the effectiveness of an instructional coach on the retention of beginning teachers?
 - 1b. How do participants describe the instructional coaching model and its role in teacher retention?

Definition of Key Terms

This research includes several key terms often associated with instructional coaching and teacher retention. These terms can be found throughout the study; the definitions below offer clarification of the terms' meanings.

Beginning teacher

A teacher within their first two years in the profession.

Effective

Merriam-Webster defines effective as “producing a decided, decisive or desired effect” (Merriam-Webster, 2018, p. 1).

Induction program

The Texas Education Agency explains induction programs as a welcoming program to support new teachers in order to aid in their professional development and retention (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Instructional coach

Instructional coaches are staff members who partner with teachers to “analyze current reality, set goals, identify and explain teaching strategies to hit goals, and provide support until goals are met.” (Knight, 2016, p. 1)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Alyson Klein, a reporter for *Education Week*, describes the No Child Left Behind Law of 2002 as a law aimed to “close the achievement gap between poor and minority students and their more advantaged peers” (Klein, 2015, p. 1). Under this law, the federal government’s role expanded

public schools' accountability for their students' progress. The law also focuses specifically on certain groups of students whose "achievement, on average, trails their peers" (p. 2).

Professional learning community (PLC)

"A professional learning community, or PLC, is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students" (Great Schools Partnership, 2014, p. 1).

Reading First Initiative (RF)

The Reading First Initiative is a component of No Child Left Behind that targets students' reading achievement by prioritizing teacher development, establishing reading instructional coaches, supporting struggling readers in federally funded schools and operating a curriculum backed by "scientifically based reading research" (Herlihy, Kemple, Bloom, Zhu & Berlin, 2009, p. 1)

Texas Education Agency (TEA)

"The Texas Education Agency is the state agency that oversees primary and secondary public education in the state of Texas. It helps deliver education to more than 5 million students" (Texas Education Agency, 2016b, p. 1).

Title I

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (as cited in National Center for Education Statistics, 2016) define the Title I program as follows:

This program provides financial assistance through state educational agencies (SEAs) to local educational agencies (LEAs) and public schools with high numbers or percentages

of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards. (p. 1)

Summary

This introduction expressed the need to analyze the relationship between direct support from an instructional coach and the retention of first- and second-year teachers. District administrators are aware that teachers are leaving the profession at staggering rates and have put practices in place to curtail this trend; however, the key to keeping teachers in classrooms remains elusive. The case study of Star Elementary examines the relationship between direct support from an instructional coach and novice teachers' decision to continue their work at Star Elementary. Chapter II explores the literature related to both teacher retention and instructional coaches in order to provide a deeper understanding of the two concepts.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review examines the issue of teacher retention and the role of instructional coaches. First, it provides an overview of the teacher retention crisis followed by the policies and procedures put in place by administrators in order to minimize the volume of teachers exiting the profession. Next, the review explores the history of instructional coaching and how the role of coaching has developed due to changes in teacher needs, the dynamics in education and legislation enacted. The literature review also provides a synopsis of various instructional coaching models.

Elena Aguilar (2018) states that education carries a myriad of emotions for its staff members ranging from frustration and anger to relief and happiness. She also stresses that burnout is not a permanent state; with the guidance of others, it is possible to recover and remain in one's position instead of seeking alternate careers. One of the many questions that have remained unsolved in education is how to increase job satisfaction in a way that teachers continue to grow and improve in their craft. In order to provide quality education to students, districts need teachers who stay in their position long enough to become experts in their field (Troutt, 2014). Districts know what systems and supports novice teachers need but remain unsure of how to accomplish the goal of retaining quality teachers. The literature examined in the following sections provides further research on these issues.

The Issue of Teacher Retention

When Teachers Leave

Education today is faced with a crisis: teachers, especially new teachers, are leaving the profession at an astonishing rate. Whereas policymakers credit teachers reaching retirement age and a drastic increase in student enrollment for teacher shortages, the causes include school staffing actions, family or personal reasons, the pursuit of another job, and low job satisfaction that are perpetuating high teacher turnover (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Districts across the nation are struggling to retain new teachers past their first year as researched by Norton (1999), who found that between 25% - 30% of teachers leave after their first year and a mere 50% of teachers continue to teach after five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Norton, 1999; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). Annually, districts lose an average of 16% of the teachers they employ; unfortunately, teachers are nearly twice as likely to leave high-poverty schools (Berry & Hirsch, 2005). In fact, the National Center for Educational Statistics states high poverty public schools lose over one-fifth of their staff every school year (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). In addition, the emphasis placed on accountability has further exposed the lack of quality of the teaching workforce and highlighted the shortcomings of the overall character of today's teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Reasons for Teacher Turnover

Lack of administrative support. Teachers are leaving the profession early in their careers for various reasons (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). There are obvious trends that show common factors. First, teachers choose to leave the profession due to a lack of administrative support. Some teachers have not had prior classroom experience outside of student teaching or

college internships. These teachers are especially in need of administrative support; however, this oftentimes gets delegated to other campus leaders (Howder, 2013). On campuses where seniority is held in a high regard and drives the campus culture, novice teachers are often given class rosters with low-performing students or students with chronic behavior issues (Esch, 2010). In these instances, a lack of administrative support can lead a teacher to find an alternate career (Coggins & Peske, 2011). Coggins and Peske concluded that the message this attitude conveys to amateur teachers is “Wait your turn, accept the system as it is and in time, it will work for you. Assimilate or leave” (2011, p. 1). At the core of this issue is teachers’ need for recognition. Teachers yearn to be recognized by their campus administrators for their accomplishments. Upon reaching their goals, teachers clamor for increased levels of leadership and authority (Coggins & Peske, 2011).

Kaufman and Al-Bataineh (2011) found that first- and second-year teachers require guidance from their campus administrators in the form of “regular and frequent constructive feedback” (p. 253). Kaufman and Al-Bataineh (2011) conducted a study involving ninety-seven public school teachers from seventeen elementary schools, three junior high schools and two high schools in a school district located in Central Illinois. All teachers were in their first five years of teaching. Teachers were administered a survey created by the researchers including “seventeen Likert scale items with possible responses ranging from 1 [strongly agree] to 7 [strongly disagree]” (p. 256). All survey questions pertained to factors influencing teacher retention.

Among the factors rated the most influential was support from peers and administrators. The researchers determined that a rise in the levels of support from peers and administrators

would increase teachers' likeliness to remain in the field of education (Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011). Mirroring the research of Bobeck (2002), the study concluded that establishing supportive relationships among colleagues and administrators is a crucial factor in lowering teacher attrition rates (as cited in Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011). While teachers reported that administrators did communicate expectations, a lack of frequent feedback led to novice teachers feeling unsupported and insecure in their teaching abilities.

Lack of professional development. Teachers also cite a lack of professional development as a factor urging them to find an alternate career (Boyd et al., 2011). Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, and Autio (2007) maintain that professional development, in order to be effective, should be ongoing, embedded in teachers' daily routines and relevant to the challenges they face. However, the professional development teachers frequently receive is in the form of a "one-shot workshop" (p. 1). Education is one of the only fields in which a new professional entering the workplace is expected to perform at high levels immediately upon beginning their position. However, new teachers need ample and continuous training in order to attain success at high levels. These trainings can take the form of professional learning communities (PLCs), district inservice, training seminars, teacher conferences, collaborative meetings, study groups or continuing education courses. While various training methods are used in different ways specific to a campus's needs, the foundation is common and is created with teacher development in mind. When teachers lack continuing education as they progress through their first few years in the profession, the result is a deficit in the knowledge necessary to improve their craft and become experts in their field (Troutt, 2014).

Regrettably, teachers with stronger qualifications are more likely to leave teaching (Boyd et al., 2011). New teachers require training on a vast number of topics such as curriculum management, inclusion strategies, creating quality assessments, analyzing data to make informed decisions, examining student work as formative assessments, motivating and creating career opportunities for student success, documentation of student progress, and evolving campus policies and procedures (Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008). Without the necessary trainings in place, it is conceivable that a novice teacher can struggle with reaching success in their classroom.

Lack of induction programs. Teachers are also leaving the field of education due to a lack of induction programs (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). Each district offers its own distinct format of induction programs for teachers entering the field. Traditional teacher education delivers information that results in graduates who have little to no sense of how learning theories relate to their fieldwork. Teacher beliefs frequently remain unchanged throughout traditional teacher education. In such instances, districts are tasked with the responsibility of guiding teachers to adjust their philosophy of education as they navigate the trials of their first year in the field. Having inefficient or nonexistent induction programs further contributes to the disconnect between theory taught in traditional teacher education and real-world practice.

Once teachers enter the workplace, they are expected to participate in the induction programs their districts offer; however, this participation is not always the case. For example, in 2005 Chicago Public Schools mandated that teachers attend their district's induction program. Yet, roughly one-fifth of the new teachers in the district stated they did not participate (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). It is often found that teachers believe that induction programs do not last long

enough to gain sufficient information (Troutt, 2014). For example, many induction programs hold meetings before the start of the school year only to discontinue meetings throughout the school year when novice teachers need the collaboration the most, resulting in novice teachers working in isolation (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011). Research by Darling-Hammond (2003) found that the highest quality induction programs involved mentors and are effective in retaining teachers (as cited in Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011).

Lack of mentoring programs. Like professional development and induction programs, new teachers have been shown to thrive when provided a mentor; obvious connections have been found between a teacher being mentored and that teacher continuing to work in the education profession (Strong & Baron, 2004). Unfortunately, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) identified multiple inconsistencies among mentoring programs and how they differ from district to district. First, the selection criteria for mentors varies depending on the location. For example, some mentor positions are mandatory and others are voluntary. Second, in some districts, mentors are compensated with incentivized pay for their time spent with their mentee and other districts do not offer such compensation. Third, there are districts who carefully pair mentors and mentees based on certain criteria; alternately, there are districts that place mentees with any available mentor and offer minimal forethought into the benefits of the partnership. Fourth, the duration and intensity of the mentoring program can vary from a single meeting to a highly structured and productive program throughout the school year. Finally, the number of participants that enter the mentoring program varies depending on how many teachers are new to a school or district.

Aside from the inconsistencies found between differing mentoring programs, teachers have identified additional shortcomings. Some mentoring programs are implemented poorly at

the school site (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). For example, some mentors are unable to find sufficient time to mentor effectively. Mentoring meetings often take place during teachers' conference periods or before or after school; this has been found to be counterproductive as teachers are losing instructional planning time due to meetings with their mentors (Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011). Regrettably, some mentors do not possess a high skill set, due to a lack of training, to share with their mentees in critical areas such as classroom management. Specifically, many mentors lack experience in evidence-based mentoring methods (Tschannen-Moran, B. & Tschannen-Moran, M., 2011). Mentees also feel they have a lack of choice as to who their mentor should be (Long, 2009).

Mentoring programs, while beneficial when implemented effectively, are an additional task that requires teachers' time. Teachers find that there is not always an excess of time available to them to observe their mentor teachers so that the mentees can learn new skills (Berry, 2005). Ultimately, mentoring or coaching that is done without purpose is ineffective, wasteful and sometimes destructive to novice and impressionable teachers (Knight et al., 2015). When poorly implemented, mentoring programs fail to encourage teachers' autonomy or opportunities for leadership (Quartz, K.H., & TEP Research Group, 2003). Meeting with one's mentor can also feel wasteful if the mentoring program available is not tailored to meet individual teacher needs relevant to daily work experiences (Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011).

Low student performance. Low student performance can affect teachers' decisions regarding their career choice. In addition, there is a significant difference in teacher retention rates for both elementary and middle school teachers in schools that met adequate yearly progress (AYP) and schools that did not meet AYP (Stevens, 2009). According to Brill and

McCartney (2008), middle school teachers are more likely to leave the profession due to struggles associated with their students' adolescence (as cited in Hughes, 2012).

Esch (2010) cites that beginning teachers are often assigned classrooms and schedules that are filled with demanding students. Esch explains that in order to meet the criteria set in place by NCLB, teachers are forced to conform to district curriculum without consideration of their students' individual needs. Oftentimes, the parameters established by NCLB and school districts cause teachers to deliver "one size fits all" instruction (p. 308). However, this instructional delivery becomes tremendously difficult for new teachers as they often receive rosters with children grouped based on cognitive aptitude, many times at the lower end of the spectrum. Furthermore, new teachers' rosters also often include students characterized by behavioral problems. This system of grouping students can lead to disruptions in instruction, further forming roadblocks in the students' education (Esch, 2010).

Due to these factors, novice teachers oftentimes work diligently to meet their students' needs, resulting in a lack of time for "collaboration and reflection" (Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011). These issues are compounded in schools with high mobility rates as studies have proven mobile students do not make progress comparable to stable students (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). A study conducted by Ingersoll and Smith in 2003 found that student discipline and a lack of student motivation was the second strongest factor in first- and second- year teachers' decision to leave the profession.

Low teacher salary. Low teacher salaries also affect teacher turnover rates; for some individuals, the opportunity cost of staying in the teaching profession is unreasonable for their lifestyle and needs (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). When compared to other professions

requiring a college degree, the teaching profession often places their employees on a lower pay scale (Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011). A study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2008 found “of all teachers leaving the profession, 25% of mathematics and science teachers and 23% of all other teachers did so in the search of better salary and benefits” (p. 255; as cited in Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011). However, the fact that teachers’ salaries are funded through residents’ tax dollars means that there is no quick or simple solution to rectify this concern.

Springer, Swain, and Rodriguez (2016) describe schools across a district as inequitable based on factors such as “condition of the school building, principal leadership, safety, distance from home and perhaps most important, the makeup of the student body” (p. 200). However, the teacher salaries are uniform across the district regardless of these discrepancies. To offset these contrasts, some districts have adopted policies that offer teachers financial incentives such as “signing bonuses, certification stipends, tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, tax credits, and housing subsidies” (Springer, Swain & Rodriguez, 2016, p. 200) to draw teachers to schools considered difficult to staff. Lastly, teachers’ workloads continue to increase in order to meet the demands of state accountability; however, as their workload demands increased efforts, their salaries remain stagnant (Hughes, 2012).

Springer, Swain, and Rodriguez conducted a study in Tennessee public schools to determine whether teacher bonuses had an impact on teacher retention (2016). Specifically, teachers were selected from “priority schools” that committed to executing the state’s teacher retention bonus program. Each teacher participating in the retention bonus program had the opportunity to earn a \$5,000 bonus upon deciding to remain in their teaching position for another

school year. After collecting significant data from 2,005 teachers, the researchers found that there was “no significant overall effect for the offer of retention bonuses” on teacher retention (Springer, Swain & Rodriguez, 2016, p. 209).

Lack of positive working conditions. Teaching is a field wrought with emotion with an endless list of tasks to be accomplished. According to Kaufman and Al-Bataineh (2011), new teachers constantly find themselves working in isolation. By implementing “family-like” (p. 252) practices, teachers feel included in their working environment and a collaborative community can be established. Teachers yearn to be seen as individuals and not merely a figurehead responsible for a classroom of students. Additional activities suggested to end teacher isolation are collaborative teaching, peer evaluation and conversations reflecting on best practices.

Tait (2008) determined that “teaching is one of the few professions in which beginners have as much responsibility as their experienced colleagues” (p. 58). The job of a teacher is extensive, described by Kaufman and Al-Bataineh (2011) as ranging from learning how to work with colleagues, handling paperwork and meeting the needs of a wide variety of student abilities. In order to meet the demands presented to them, novice teachers often work outside of contract hours; this level of stress can often lead to conditions such as illnesses, both mental and physical, or cause teachers to leave the profession. Additional stressors, such as the state accountability assessment or professional evaluations, can cause a beginning teacher to feel incompetent or fearful of others’ perceptions.

Geographic area can also be a deciding factor for teachers. For example, a study in Georgia determined that the Metro Atlanta region had the lowest teacher retention rates in the state (Stevens, 2009). The Metro Atlanta area is characterized by a high urban population with

many minority families. The population is also largely low-income and contains historically low-performing schools. Overall, several aspects of a teacher's job can add stress to an already stressful and fast-paced working environment.

There are an abundance of valid concerns teachers have regarding continuing in their profession. An initial investment needs to be made when teachers first enter the workplace in order to enhance teacher effectiveness. However, if teachers view the profession as temporary or a field they can easily excuse themselves from, these initial investments will not be impactful (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Placement in Title I Schools

While high teacher turnover rates are common among districts across the country, these issues are exacerbated in Title I schools. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (as cited in National Center for Education Statistics, 2016) define the Title I program as follows:

This program provides financial assistance through state educational agencies (SEAs) to local educational agencies (LEAs) and public schools with high numbers or percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards. (p. 1)

Murnane describes the hallways of consistently low-performing schools as typically filled with students who are living in poverty and disproportionate numbers of children of color who do not receive adequate resources and oftentimes are taught by poorly skilled teachers (2007). These schools are plagued with staff who are weak leaders, lack critical skills, leave learning problems unattended and are inconsistent. Teachers also have described the students in low-

income schools as frequently presenting themselves as disciplinary issues and maintaining a lack of intrinsic motivation.

Borman and Kimball (2005) conducted a study in Nevada to examine the distribution of teachers across classrooms with high numbers of poverty and minority students in relation to the teachers' composite evaluation score. Upon collecting data from the district regarding student scores on both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests for mathematics and reading in third through sixth grades, the researchers compared student scores to teachers' composite evaluation scores. The average years of experience of the nearly 400 teacher participants were between ten and eleven years of service. The researchers then examined how the teachers' evaluation scores were dispersed among the classrooms of "varying poverty and minority concentrations and varying reading and mathematics pretest scores" (Borman & Kimball, 2005, p. 9). Quantitative procedures such as descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA were used and the researchers' findings were decidedly grim. Borman and Kimball (2005) found that classrooms in fourth through sixth grades with a higher concentration of poor children were taught by teachers with lower composite evaluation scores as compared to classrooms with below average concentrations of poverty. Researchers also concluded that classes in fourth through sixth grades with a higher percentage of minority students were instructed by teachers who had received lower evaluation scores when compared to classrooms with lower percentages of minority students. Similarly, classrooms with low pretest scores for both reading and mathematics were also taught by teachers who had earned lower evaluation scores as opposed to classrooms with high pretest scores.

Duncan and Murnane (2014) explain that “peer problems, geographic mobility, and challenges in attracting and retaining good teachers have made it difficult to provide consistently high-quality learning experiences in schools serving a large population of low-income students” when compared to their more affluent counterparts (p. 9). Due to a shift in economic segregation, students in these low-income schools are two to four times more likely to have peers in their classes with either behavioral problems or low cognitive skills (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). Students frequently leave school before earning a diploma or having the skills needed to earn a decent living, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. A high school graduate earns, on average, 75% more than an individual without a high school diploma. A study conducted by Teach for America (TFA) in 2004 (as cited in Murnane, 2007, p. 172) contained two shocking findings: (a) less than 4% of teachers in low-performing schools serving poor and minority students graduated from colleges considered to be competitive, and (b) 30% of those teachers had no student teaching experience, therefore were walking into their classroom without background knowledge or experience to rely on.

Educators’ focus in the past several years has been on increasing the supply of quality teachers in urban schools. However, this movement has been characterized by a lack of preparation and training programs for those teachers returning to the campus year after year (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). An overwhelming lack of knowledge has plagued teacher preparation programs in terms of arming teachers with the necessary knowledge to reach urban students. New teachers claim that urban schools typically are staffed with teachers content with the status quo. These campuses are especially in need of fresh ideas, new practices, and a

new spirit; however, when new, skilled teachers enter these locations, they are often seen as opposition by the resident teachers (Berry, 2005).

Unfortunately, teachers list these factors, in addition to other common issues such as unsupportive administration, inadequate facilities, and too few community supports, as reasons they leave the profession (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). Educators are more likely to leave schools with ineffective leaders; however, this teacher exodus occurs even more so in urban settings (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016). Furthermore, Title I schools typically are unable to offer incentivized pay or other enticing supports to attract talented teachers to underperforming schools (Murnane, 2007). Those districts that are able to offer a financial incentive do so in order to retain, ideally, highly capable teachers in schools that are historically difficult to staff (Springer, Swain, & Rodriguez, 2016). Currently, only 19% of board-certified and effective teachers complete a rigorous training that prepares them to teach in low-performing schools or in schools serving poor and minority students (Berry, 2005). The remaining teachers are not provided with a high-quality professional development, leading to teachers settling into complacency. Murnane (2007) states that skilled teachers are leaving Title I and low-performing schools serving poor children due to “their dysfunctional behavior” as a result of being held to unattainable standards (p. 165). Summatively, teachers cite difficult work conditions as their primary reason for leaving low-performing schools, and low-performing schools are often left with the least amount of teaching talent (Murnane, 2007).

One-half of beginning teachers exit the profession within their first five years of teaching (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). Whereas average school districts lose roughly 15%-16% of their teaching staff annually, poor urban public schools experience an annual turnover of

nearly 30%. Mathematics, science, and special education teachers are leaving the career field at a higher rate than other content teachers, which is especially concerning as these are considered “high need fields” by TEA (2016a). In addition, men tend to leave teaching permanently more often than women to seek opportunities in different fields, but women tend to leave earlier in their careers due to family lifestyle issues such as a marriage or children. Unfortunately, early career teachers who are considered to be the “best and brightest” are the professionals most likely to leave schools with poor working conditions (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). In summary, students in Title I schools, at times low-performing schools, are in desperate need of teachers to act as their champion. Unfortunately, these schools are experiencing higher teacher attrition rates than other locations.

Implications of High Teacher Turnover

The implications of high teacher turnover rates for districts are staggering. Primarily, districts are losing money and student achievement is decreasing. As teachers continue to pursue alternate careers, districts are losing valuable funding due to necessary spending on recruitment and re-training as they replace vacant teaching positions (Troutt, 2014). The cost that districts and campuses are facing due to high teacher turnover rates is shocking. For example, it has been found that Chicago Public Schools lose approximately \$17,000 per “new teacher leaver” who exits their district (Barnes, Crowe & Schaefer, 2007). In 2005, the AEE (Alliance for Excellent Education) conducted a “national analysis of teacher attrition costs” (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010, p. 26). Using an estimate from the United States Department of Labor, the analysis concluded that the cost of “replacing public school teachers that leave the profession” neared \$2.2 billion yearly nationwide. When also taking into consideration the

teachers who transfer schools, the national cost rises to “approximately \$4.9 billion per year” (p. 27). A research study conducted for the Texas State Board for Education Certification by the Texas Center for Education Research in 2000 analyzed the state’s cost to replace its public school teachers. One model in the study “estimated that the cost per employee is equal to roughly 25 percent of the departing teacher’s annual salary plus the cost of benefits” (Shockley, Guglielmino, & Watlington, 2006, p. 110).

School districts are finding themselves in a conundrum as they go through the procedure of hiring new teachers for spots left empty. These procedures include spending money on recruiting, advertising, training new educators, providing orientation, completing background checks, and providing professional development. These necessary components of teacher induction create a drain on human resource capacity and force districts to cut costs in other areas as they forge their way through the teacher retention crisis (Troutt, 2014).

Student achievement, every educators’ primary focus and goal, is decreasing due to low teacher retention rates. Since the 1980s, both the number and instability of novice teachers has increased (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). To further demonstrate this point, the United States’ graduation rate has fallen from first to twelfth internationally (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). Students are now sitting in classrooms with teachers who are not experts in their craft nor committed to providing a quality education for their students (Carroll & Foster, 2010; Troutt, 2014). Fifty-two percent of classrooms today are led by teachers with ten or fewer years of experience (Coggins & Peske, 2011). A teaching quality gap has historically existed between high-performing schools and schools with a large at-risk population. This gap never closes for schools that find themselves constantly rebuilding their staff due to high attrition rates, creating

unstable working and learning environments for students and staff alike (Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011; Troutt, 2014). Furthermore, teacher turnover is causing disruption to the education system's internal cohesion (Boyd et al., 2011).

Interventions to Curtail Teacher Turnover

Districts nationwide are clamoring to find a remedy to reduce the amount of teachers leaving the workplace in pursuit of alternate careers. Since 2010, the number of states implementing teacher retention incentive policies has more than doubled (Springer, Swain & Rodriguez, 2016). Districts have been funneling resources into interventions to curtail teacher turnover. The interventions implemented include training to produce high-quality administrators, effective professional development opportunities, PLCs, quality induction programs, incentivized pay, differentiated recruitment and selection strategies, and finally, mentoring and coaching programs.

High-quality administrators. District and campus administrators play a pivotal role in the climate in which teachers work (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). In order to retain teachers and increase job satisfaction, districts have placed an emphasis on recruiting and growing leaders with high potential (Boyd et al., 2011). In addition, districts have implemented apprenticeship procedures in which prospective leaders receive relevant training through hands-on experiences. Lastly, districts have also put procedures in place to provide quality supports to principals while in the position. Similar to the supports classroom teachers need in order to best serve their students, campus administrators require the same supports. By providing such supports, campus administrators have the ability to create an environment of collaboration and community for their staff. Furthermore, administrators are then able to focus on the “bridging” aspect of their position

in which administrators build relationships and connect with others (Howder, 2013, p. 48). This is accomplished through authentic experiences that encourage active listening, understanding and building collaborative communities and establishing a climate of trust.

Effective professional development. Professional development should be viewed as a tool to increase teacher effectiveness and ultimately, student achievement. Districts are now implementing a system of professional development targeted at preparing teachers to meet the needs of their diverse students. Center X's Teacher Education Program located at the University of California at Los Angeles partners with Urban Educator Network to provide ongoing professional development to students at UCLA so as to prepare them to teach twenty-first-century students (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). This system of professional learning has six characteristics that instill necessary knowledge in teachers to better prepare them in the classroom. First, professional development focuses on a commitment to social justice. Second, a diverse group of both faculty and aspiring teachers form a small, long-term professional learning cohort to ensure multiple groups are represented and heard. Third, the professional development philosophy holds learning as a social and dialogical inquiry. Fourth, the leaders of the professional development sessions ground their practices in theory and research. Fifth, moral, cultural and political dimensions are integrated into the teaching done at the professional development gatherings. Lastly, the leaders of the professional development sessions emphasize the importance of communities both in schools and in classrooms. These characteristics are generalizable and can be translated to other professional development opportunities available to teachers.

Professional learning communities (PLCs). It is now commonplace to see professional learning communities occur on campuses as many districts have taken the step to initiate this collaborative learning method. Professional learning communities, commonly referred to as PLCs, allow teachers time to discuss with colleagues how to achieve student success through the use of best practices (DuFour & DuFour, 2013). PLCs greatly impact teachers at campuses with high teacher attrition; participating in PLCs has the potential to reinforce the participants' decision to be a teacher, rendering them more likely to remain in the teaching profession (Troutt, 2014). Effective PLCs “empower teachers, set goals and develop action plans” (Thornton, 2010, p. 41). When teachers gather in a PLC, they are fostering teacher leadership and are focused on bettering themselves and their colleagues. As an end result, student learning increases when teachers feel empowered and as if they belong to a collaborative culture.

Collecting from research by Little, Marzano, Lezotte, Reeves and Brophy and Good (as cited in DuFour, 2007), student achievement flourishes when teachers come together as a team to create a “viable curriculum”, monitor student learning, formatively assess students, hold high expectations for all students and operate under a “collective commitment” to grow all students (p. 7). Districts implementing and operating as PLCs have the ability to transform schools and enhance teacher understanding of the profession.

Purposeful induction programs. School districts have grown more intentional and purposeful in structuring induction programs for their incoming teachers. The amount of teachers participating in induction programs had increased over the past two decades. Whereas 40% of new teachers participated in 1990, the participation rate grew to nearly 80% by 2008 (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teachers who participate in induction programs have stated that they attain a

higher level of job satisfaction, a stronger commitment to their field and are more likely to continue in the field of education.

Induction programs today have four central goals for their teacher participants (Fulton, Yoon & Lee, 2005). First, induction programs strive to build teacher knowledge. By building upon what teachers enter the field already knowing, induction programs are growing teacher capacity. This, in turn, can translate to a higher level of student achievement. Second, induction programs focus on integrating new teachers into the school community and culture. Whereas teacher isolation was mentioned as a stressor, therefore a factor contributing to teacher attrition, induction programs now provide opportunities for teachers to embed themselves in the school's infrastructure. Third, induction programs support the continuous development of all teachers by prioritizing teachers' needs and tailoring opportunities for continued growth. The fourth and final goal of induction programs is to encourage professional development. By encouraging teachers to learn and hone their skills, induction programs are channeling their resources directly into the classroom to positively affect students. The professional development districts are offering in induction programs are now focusing on providing a multicultural teacher education so teachers are prepared to meet the needs of their diverse students (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003).

Incentivized pay. School districts currently employ a variety of strategies surrounding incentivized pay to assist in the retention of high-quality teachers. A “causal link” between bonus offers and the retention of high-quality teachers was noted in research conducted by Springer, Swain, and Rodriguez. (2016, p. 216). Districts, if financial resources allow, can offer signing bonuses to teachers who sign a contract to teach at a difficult to staff school (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). School districts also offer assistance through student loan forgiveness or housing

assistance. One strategy districts use to increase the number of highly qualified teachers on their campuses is tuition reimbursement. Some districts also have created “service scholarship programs,” which act as forgivable loans assuming teaching candidates work in high-need fields and locations upon completing the program (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 20). If schools are able to help finance graduate programs for their newer teachers, they are ultimately grooming their teachers to learn best practices and implement those practices with the campus’s students and staff.

Several studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of incentivized pay. A study conducted in Georgia discovered that a 10% increase in board-certified teachers’ salaries who agreed to teach at one of the state’s lowest performing schools for two years was incentive enough to staff those campuses (as cited in Berry, 2005). Likewise, a study conducted in South Carolina found that \$18,000 salary bonuses attracted 20% more curriculum specialists to fill positions in the state’s lowest-performing schools. Miami-Dade County in Florida designated 39 low-performing schools as a “school improvement zone” (Murnane, 2007, p. 173). Teachers who accept a position in one of these schools, agreeing to work both a longer school day as well as a longer school year, receive a 20% pay increase. Springer, Swain, and Rodriguez (2016) discovered that financial bonuses have the potential to retain teachers at the higher end of talent distribution, resulting in a positive overall effect on school faculty as the incentivized pay mitigates novice teacher turnover. In the nation, over fourteen states provide incentives for teachers to work in what is considered a hard-to-staff school (Murnane, 2007). However, while positive outcomes have been expressed by researchers, there were also instances in which this

teacher retention intervention has been unsuccessful. Berry (2005) found that in Massachusetts, a \$20,000 signing bonus failed at attracting sufficient teachers to fill challenging schools.

Recruitment and selection strategies. As the unique needs of students across America shift, so does a district's recruitment process. As a method of addressing the teaching shortage, districts are resorting to nontraditional recruitment and selection strategies (Rebore, 2015). For example, career-change programs have been implemented in order to entice professionals into changing their career in the middle of its trajectory to enter the education field (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Therefore, an increased number of minority groups and career-changers are entering the teaching field (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). In addition, many schools groom and recruit the talented paraprofessionals working on their campus to be classroom teachers upon completion of a teacher preparation program. This practice is used especially in urban schools where paraprofessionals of color are highly recruited and more likely to stay in the district.

Another program available is alternative certification programs (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). While this practice has increased the number of teachers districts are able to place in classrooms, the alternative certification programs also minimize the amount of training pre-service teachers receive. Students of an alternative certification program are often allowed to begin teaching immediately under a probationary license and avoid formal training, increasing the number of teacher candidates as the process is timely and allows an adult to make a speedy career change. Another example of teachers entering into the profession in a manner timelier than usual is Polk County Public Schools in Florida (DeNisco, 2018). Faced with a teacher shortage, the district's superintendent initiated a program that allowed high school sophomores

to begin taking teacher education courses and graduate with both a high school diploma and as well as an associate's degree. The high school graduates then attend a nearby college and after receiving a bachelor's degree in two years, return to Polk County Public Schools as a teacher. Universities in Mississippi offer similar programs to encourage teacher candidates to enroll in teacher education programs.

Instructional coaching. The idea of coaching dates back to the days of an apprentice learning through the leadership of a master craftsman or carpenter (Smith & Lynch, 2014). Today in education, districts have implemented instructional coach positions to give new teachers a local guide as they enter a new profession and workplace (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Seen by districts as a successful way to teach classroom management as well as instructional practices, instructional coaches work alongside teachers on their campus to help teachers achieve their goals (Corbell, Osborne & Reiman, 2010). Several districts in Ohio and New York have reduced their teacher turnover rate by nearly 25% by building time into novice teachers' schedules to work closely with instructional coaches (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Colonial School District in Delaware implemented a recruitment strategy targeted to increase teacher retention through access to leadership opportunities (Leida, 2018). Realizing that not all high-quality teachers aim to become administrators, Colonial School District implemented the role of instructional coaches at both the district and campus levels to provide leadership opportunities and advancements for their exemplary teachers. Peter Leida, assistant superintendent of Colonial School District, describes the district's philosophy as "always be recruiting" (2018, p. 1). These instructional coach positions allow teachers to develop their capacity and "take on a leadership role without becoming an administrator" (Leida, 2018, p. 1).

Simultaneously, teachers prepare themselves for future roles in administration by operating in a campus leadership position.

Wong (2004) states that instructional coaches have two primary tasks: facilitate the learning of content knowledge amongst teachers and advise on classroom management practices. This is a model many districts follow. Instructional coaches' presence also assists in reducing the difficulty of transitioning as they provide veteran guidance to teachers. These tasks result in the maximization of retention rates of highly qualified teachers. At the core of the instructional coach position lies three important processes: collaboration, sustained and embedded learning context and continuous support (Smith & Lynch, 2014).

The Role of Instructional Coaches

History of Instructional Coaches

The idea of instructional coaching originated in 1965 with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA was the first federal initiative designed to establish funding for compensatory reading education in US schools from Title I funds, according to Dole's research (2004). ESEA's goal was to improve reading achievement in schools with a high number of students living in poverty. ESEA established the position of reading specialists, staff members who were considered experts in the content and provided teachers necessary supports in order to reach struggling readers. Reading specialists worked with teachers daily to increase their knowledge of research-based practices. Reading specialists also assisted teachers in the classroom. This position evolved from a basic model of reading specialists working with struggling students to encouraging specialists to work with the teachers of struggling students (Dole, 2004).

The year 1999 brought further changes from the federal government as the Reading Excellence Act (REA) was passed. REA granted federal funds to states in order to help impoverished schools reach their struggling learners (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). REA posed three goals for educators: (1) teach every student to read by the end of third grade; (2) improve reading instruction through the use of scientifically based reading research; and (3) provide early intervention to children experiencing reading difficulties to prevent inappropriate referrals to Special Education. In order for educators to accomplish the goals that REA established, schools used REA funds to provide professional development, tutor students and staff reading instructional coaches.

In 2000, ESEA was modified and placed a heavier emphasis on the need for highly qualified reading teachers as well as the implementation of reading materials and instructional practices that were supported by scientific research to strengthen the shift from content specialists working with struggling students to content specialists focusing on enhancing the quality of teaching (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Legislation that followed ESEA in 2000 provided incentives and funding for the position of instructional coaches (2009).

The federal government signed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) into law in 2002. NCLB contained the Reading First Initiative (RF). In this initiative, NCLB allocated federal funds to qualifying schools to help teachers strengthen their current teaching skills in addition to gaining new skills regarding reading instructional strategies in kindergarten through third grade (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). According to a detailed overview of Reading First by the U.S. Department of Education, federal funds were first dispersed to states that created a detailed plan of how these funds would bolster students' reading skills. Funds then made their way to local school districts

and schools which demonstrated a need based on their students' current reading skills (2014). RF was designed to support student progress in schools; legislation also suggested that schools employ instructional coaches as a means to provide sustained and effective professional development support for teachers in RF schools. Deussen et al (2007) state that in three of five states their study focused on, coaches who supported the RF initiative were required explicitly to spend "60 to 80 percent of their time in the classroom with teachers or working with teachers directly on their instruction" (p. iv).

Clearly, the origin of instructional coaching is held in federal legislation (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Dole, 2004). The federal government recognized that our nation's children needed high-quality instruction in reading and made changes to address these shortcomings. Instructional coaches were seen as one intervention that could be applied to support children's education through empowering teachers. In turn, as instructional coaches have increased teachers' abilities, they have also been seen as trusted advisers to support new teachers in their first years in the field of education (Denmark, 2013).

Forms of Instructional Coaching

Much like all aspects of education, each district and campus hold a unique perspective on the roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches (Deussen et al., 2007). Various models of instructional coaching have been implemented and studied throughout school districts. Whereas varying models of instructional coaching exist, all models operate with similar fundamental ideas (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). On a foundational level, instructional coaching is seen as a method of providing professional development that is job-embedded, continuous throughout the school year, relevant to the challenges teachers experience in the classroom and delivered by staff that is

familiar with the campus's and teachers' needs (Deussen et al, 2007). These core beliefs ensure that the criteria of high-quality teacher professional development are acknowledged.

Effective instructional coaching models. The instructional coach population is largely comprised of former teachers considered experts in their content area. Smith and Lynch (2014) express that instructional coaches who hail from a teaching background have the schema to reach both the professional and personal side of a campus's teaching staff, enabling teachers to reach their full potential. Dole details several characteristics of effective instructional coaches in her 2004 study on instructional coaches in school reform. First, instructional coaches, as previously mentioned, must have experience as effective classroom teachers. Second, instructional coaches must be able to reflect on their own instructional practice in order to work best with growing teachers. Third, they must be capable of articulating the interactions they observe in a classroom so that they may relay their observations to classroom teachers. Fourth, they need to carefully balance between supporting the status quo and placing stress on teachers to advance them professionally. Lastly, instructional coaches must be flexible and able to organize their thoughts and actions on a moment's notice.

Deussen, Coski, Robinson, Autio: 5 categories of coaching. Deussen et al.'s 2007 research described five different forms of instructional coaching used in schools under the Reading First Initiative. Throughout the study, the researchers found that campuses held varying expectations for the 190 participating instructional coaches regarding the amount of time coaches were expected to spend in the classrooms alongside teachers as opposed to working directly with campus data.

Data-oriented coaches. Data-oriented instructional coaches primarily focused on student data. Using the student data that teachers collected, instructional coaches focused their attention on assessment tasks. Instructional coaches spent the majority of their time either administering assessments, managing the data such as entering the data manually or charting the results and interpreting the data to provide guidance for classroom teachers. These coaches spent a minimal amount of time working directly with teachers in an instructional coach capacity. Fifteen percent of the instructional coach participants fell in this category.

Student-oriented coaches. Student-oriented instructional coaches focused their efforts on providing interventions directly to struggling students. The coaches were expected to academically grow students rather than campus teachers. In instances where instructional coaches would work in classrooms, the developmental focus remained on the students in need as opposed to providing coaching support to the teacher delivering the instruction. This category of instructional coaches devoted their time to tasks such as planning and delivering interventions. Student-oriented coaches also spent a large amount of their time administering and coordinating assessments, likely in conjunction with planning the interventions that were to take place. Twenty-four percent of the participating instructional coaches belonged to this category.

Managerial coaches. Managerial coaches took on organizational responsibilities such as handling paperwork and preparing meetings for teachers and administrators to attend. Managerial coaches' job expectations related to planning for and attending curriculum meetings as well as attending professional development. However, the vast majority of their time was dedicated to "other tasks", minimizing the amount of time they spent coaching or working with

data and assessment (p. 12). Twenty-nine percent of the study's participants were categorized as managerial coaches.

Teacher-oriented coaches (group). Teacher-oriented coaches, as the name describes, spent their time focused on honing teachers' skills to improve classroom instruction. In this category, the coaching time was spent primarily in a small group setting rather than individual meetings. The instructional coaches in this group also spent an abundant amount of time planning for curriculum meetings and attending professional development. One can conclude that the instructional coaches were delivering professional development information in these meetings as opposed to focusing on assessment data as other models did. Twenty-one percent of the instructional coaches involved in the study belonged to this category.

Teacher-oriented coaches (individual). This final group of instructional coaches, totaling 11% of the participants, also spent their time focused on coaching activities. Many of their activities mirrored the actions of the previously mentioned teacher-oriented (group) coaches; the differing factor was that these coaches conducted their interactions with classroom teachers on a largely individual basis. Individual teacher-oriented coaches spent a minuscule amount of time focused on data, assessments, interventions or unrelated tasks.

Knight's three-step process. Knight et al. (2015) identified a three-step process of instructional coaching to effectively work with classroom teachers: identify, learn and improve. First, instructional coaches need to identify the teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Upon the instructional coach and teacher collaborating, a goal is established and an appropriate teaching strategy is selected to achieve the determined goal. Second, the instructional coach assists the teacher in learning and mastering the identified teaching strategy. The strategy is then

implemented in the classroom after the instructional coach has sufficiently explained and modeled alongside the classroom teacher. Lastly, the instructional coach monitors the teachers' progress throughout the implementation of the teaching strategy. An important aspect of this final step is for the instructional coach and classroom teacher to determine collaboratively if the teacher attained the previously set goal.

In a separate work by Knight, video recordings were suggested as a method to remove the instructional coaches from the learning environment so they may act as facilitators (Knight et al., 2012). Video recordings allow the instructional coach to gather data on the classroom reality to later share with the teacher as a classroom monitoring tool. For this process to be successful, the researchers explain that instructional coaches require training to understand the “complexities of working with adults” and a deep, well-rounded understanding of teaching practices so that they may communicate and lead effectively while working in an environment that fosters impactful professional development (Knight et al., 2015, p. 18).

Tschannen-Morans' “listen and learn”. Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran (2011) studied the link between instructional coaches and the position of an evaluator. Their findings concluded that, in order to be an effective instructional coach, an evaluative perspective should never be taken. The researchers concluded that instructional coaching should be teacher-centered. In an effort to improve the quality of instruction a teacher is able to deliver, the coaching interactions must be strengths-based and no-fault. These interactions build a strong relationship between the two professionals and ensure a safe environment in which teachers can take risks. The researchers also identified five critical components of an effective instructional coach: consciousness, connection, competence, contribution, and creativity.

Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran (2011) found that instructional coaches must have a sense of consciousness, which includes a strong sense of self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-monitoring. In order to impact teachers, instructional coaches must have a deep understanding of their own professional prowess. Coaches should also aim to establish “high trust connections” in order to inspire greatness within the teachers they mentor (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 13). A focus on instructional coaches’ competence is also necessary to encourage teacher ownership. Under this component, teachers are able to clearly articulate their needs, build on their strengths and be responsible for their own learning and professional development. In addition, instructional coaches must return to a teacher’s foundation of why they chose to enter the teaching profession. By grounding their practice in this foundation, teachers are reminded of the desire to contribute to the learning and overall well-being of their students as well as the families and communities that belong to their campus. Finally, instructional coaches must foster creativity by establishing a safe environment where teachers are encouraged to follow their motivations.

Directive and reflective coaching. Deussen et al. (2007) explored the differences between directive and reflective instructional coaching. Directive instructional coaches act as experts and encourage teachers to deliver instruction in a particular method, often aligning to instructional coaches’ personal philosophies. Under directive coaching, teachers are given recommendations or mandates about aspects of their practices that need to be adjusted. In this form of instructional coaching, teachers are also targeted due to identified weaknesses.

Reflective coaching takes an alternative approach to instructional coaching. Under this method, instructional coaches guide teachers to reflect on their current practices. Teachers, upon

reflecting, later initiate the interaction with the instructional coach. Reflective instructional coaches use cognitive coaching techniques to assist teachers in their professional growth. This method of coaching minimizes conflict between the instructional coach and the classroom teacher and offers a more comfortable environment for teachers.

Joyce and Showers' five coaching supports. Joyce and Showers (2002) named five primary supports instructional coaches can offer classroom teachers to aid in their professional development. First, instructional coaches provide research-based theory. This information is delivered through academic discussions, readings, and lectures. The classroom teachers have the opportunity to learn the critical rationale behind teaching strategies they use. In this support, teachers can answer the question, “Why am I doing these activities?” (Dole, 2004, p. 265). Second, instructional coaches provide quality demonstrations to teachers (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Through this practice, teachers can directly observe research-based best practices as the instructional coach models the activity directly or uses video demonstrations, which equips teachers to answer the question, “What do these activities look like in the classroom?” (Dole, 2004, p. 465).

Third, instructional coaches offer classroom teachers opportunities to practice newly learned skills (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Teachers are provided times in both the modeling session as well as the classroom environment to attempt recently learned teaching practices. This can be done in front of colleagues, small groups of students or the instructional coach in order to garner sufficient quality feedback. This support allows teachers to answer the question, “When I try these activities, what happens?” (Dole, 2004, p. 465).

Fourth, instructional coaches provide strengths-based feedback (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Instructional coaches and teachers, at this point in the process, must collaborate so the instructional coach can offer assistance and support based on observations gathered during the practice phase. Together, the instructional coach and teacher dissect the activity conducted to determine necessary action steps. Through this process, the teacher gains the knowledge to answer the question, “What could I have done differently?” (Dole, 2004, p. 465).

Fifth, the instructional coach offers opportunities for in-class coaching (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The instructional coach invites peers and colleagues to collaborate on newly learned activities and strategies with the classroom teacher. The group then discusses how to solve problems and determine solutions for mishaps that arose during the implementation. These critical conversations aid the teacher in answer the two questions, “What do I do next?” and “Where do I go from here?” (Dole, 2004, p. 465).

Showers and Joyce’s peer coaching. Dating back to the 1980s, Showers and Joyce (1996) heralded the importance of weekly meetings to “enable teachers to practice and implement the content they were learning” (p. 12). The researchers deemed it necessary to focus on classroom implementation and an analysis of teachers’ skills along with student responses to learning. Through the use of peer coaching groups, the team of teachers developed a curriculum-related goal. Teachers, along with an instructional coach who acted as a facilitator, agreed upon the number of teachers needed to create a peer coaching group. Upon forming a peer coaching group, the teachers worked collaboratively as each was observed by the group and later received feedback in a group setting. The instructional coach’s role was to facilitate these interactions and uphold the focus on curriculum.

Aguilar's inquiry-based and cognitive coaching model. In Aguilar's book, *The Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation* (2013), she outlines a model of instructional coaching based on inquiry and cognitive methods. This model is comprised of several guidelines for instructional coaches to follow. First, an instructional coach must examine student learning. As student learning is the core of education, it guides an instructional coach's path to working with teachers. In addition, the instructional coach should focus on how a teacher can alter their instructional delivery to improve student learning. Upon meeting with the teacher to reflect on their current practices, the coach works closely with the classroom teacher to facilitate the implementation of adjusted instructional practices.

Further, the instructional coach should focus on the merits of research-based strategies to continue assisting the classroom teacher. Once classroom practices have been adjusted and tailored to meet student needs, the instructional coach should assist in the development and administration of a summative assessment. The data gathered from this assessment provides data to be used for accountability and future guidance. In conclusion, Aguilar's model of instructional coaching maintains the coach's role as one who holds teachers accountable. The instructional coach's responsibility is to guide the teacher to improve student learning in the classroom and act as an accountability partner through the process.

Sweeney's student-centered coaching. Sweeney proposes a different form of instructional coaching in the form of student-centered coaching (2010). In this model, the instructional coach and teacher are partners with a shared focus of student learning. Student data and student work samples are used to guide the partners' discussions during collaborative sessions. After the instructional coach and teacher have agreed upon a goal for students to attain, formative

assessments are used to gather additional data on the students. As the instructional coach and teacher analyze the formative assessments to further drive the instruction, decisions are then made regarding differentiation, if necessary.

The instructional coach refers to textbooks, curriculum support, and technology as various research-based tools to provide to the classroom teacher to enhance the students' learning. As the students near the predetermined learning goal, the teacher and instructional coach create and administer a summative assessment to determine the progress made towards mastery. Ultimately, in Sweeney's model, the instructional coach supports the campus's teachers in moving students towards mastery of predetermined standards as selected by the two professionals.

Ineffective instructional coaching models. Studies show that coaching as a remediation to a poor evaluation, with employee termination as a possible consequence, is an ineffective method for instructional coaches to practice (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Likewise, "tell and sell" instructional coaching, a model in which an instructional coach shares previous experiences in lieu of evidence-based research, is also an ineffective coaching model. One can conclude that an instructional coach, seen as a campus leader, merely sharing their personal beliefs and experiences does not equate to teacher growth.

How Instructional Coaching is Linked to Teacher Retention

Instructional coaches have the opportunity to play a pivotal role in their campus's culture and teacher development. Seen oftentimes as campus leaders, the role of an instructional coach can be varied and complex (Deussen et al., 2007). With 50% of teachers exiting the teaching workforce within the first five years of their career, instructional coaches have the opportunity to

affect a teacher's career decision. Teachers quote isolation as a factor in their decision to switch careers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2004); instructional coaches, experts working closely alongside teachers, can strive to eliminate this feeling of loneliness. Instructional coaches, through sharing their knowledge of teaching skills and strategies, can identify critical skills both teachers and students need to learn (Dole, 2004). As teachers begin to see success in their students' learning as well as their own, teacher retention will likely improve as they continue to work in a supportive environment (Long, 2009). By placing high expectations on student and teacher achievement, instructional coaches guide teachers' way to success (Dole, 2004).

Although multiple forms of instructional coaching exist nationwide, the practice of coaching has been found to positively impact school reform (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Atul Gawande, as cited in Knight et al.'s work (2015, p. 11) states that "coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance". Theory and demonstration are insufficient for teachers to successfully apply new strategies and procedures in their classrooms (Dole, 2004). The opportunity of working with a content expert offers new teachers an ally in an otherwise stressful and foreign situation. Instructional coaches, through high-quality guidance and collaboration, have the potential to mitigate the teacher retention crisis.

Summary

Teachers are exiting the field of education at an increasingly alarming rate for a multitude of reasons. It has been found that nearly 30% of teachers choose to seek an alternate career field in their first year of teaching (Carroll & Foster, 2010). The teacher retention crisis has led to several unfortunate implications for school districts such as a loss of financial resources and a decline in student achievement (Troutt, 2014). Teachers are quoting several reasons for dismal

job satisfaction, including a lack of administrative support, ineffective professional development, a lack of induction and mentoring programs and a general feeling of isolation (Berry, 2005; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Troutt, 2014). However, as evidenced by research regarding instructional coaches, coaching is a method to support teachers “in their efforts to provide high-quality instruction in academic areas” (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009, p. 151).

Instructional coaching encourages new teachers to enhance their confidence, become reflective thinkers and embrace change; ultimately, instructional coaching can create satisfied staff members, leading to a positive campus culture and higher teacher retention rates (Long, 2009). Instructional coaching “provides a quantum leap over the abrupt and unassisted entry into teaching that characterizes the experience of many beginners” (Denmark, 2013, p. 9). Whereas research on both teacher retention and instructional coaches abounds, literature studying if a link exists between the two concepts is minimal.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Rationale

As described in Chapter II, teachers are choosing to leave the field of education in droves. Motivated by a multitude of various reasons, such a vast number of teachers exit education that a mere 50% continue teaching after five years in the workplace (Norton, 1999). As teachers continue to exit the profession in search of different employment, districts are experiencing consequences due to the inability to retain teachers. Districts' budgets continue to suffer as financial resources are funneled into new teacher training year after year as experienced teachers resign and new teachers are brought in (Troutt, 2014). Most importantly, student achievement continues to be negatively impacted by the rise in novice, less experienced teachers. As high-quality teachers continue to leave their teaching positions, more so at Title I campuses, the opportunity gap grows wider and more daunting (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

In an effort to curtail the number of teachers choosing alternative careers, districts employ several interventions to increase teacher retention rates. An emphasis on leadership qualities has created a portrait of a high-quality administrator districts aim to hire and groom. Districts also have attempted to establish effective professional learning communities, professional development, and induction programs as well as mentoring programs. In addition, attempts at incentivized pay have also been implemented. However, districts' efforts are not yielding the desired results. We are aware that teachers' low job satisfaction has created a teacher retention crisis. Currently unaware of how to resolve this issue, districts continue to seek

answers. This study focused on the working relationship between instructional coaches, both a mentor and a campus leader, and novice teachers, specifically regarding teacher retention.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact direct instructional support that an instructional coach has on the retention of a first- or second-year teacher at a Title I campus. To study this matter, I conducted a qualitative case study of Star Elementary, a Title I campus in a suburban school district. The study employed a qualitative case study design to gain a deep and complete understanding of the participants' perception of their work environment. Using a case study design allowed the research to comprehensively examine the participants' responses through narrative practices.

The research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. How would you describe the impact of having direct support from an instructional coach on the retention of beginning teachers?
 - 1a. How important is the effectiveness of an instructional coach on the retention of beginning teachers?
 - 1b. How do participants describe the instructional coaching model and its role in teacher retention?

This chapter provides a theoretical framework used as a foundation for the methodological choices that occurred throughout the study. Specifically, this chapter includes a detailed overview of the research design, the setting in which the study was conducted, the process of participant selection, the manner in which data was collected and analyzed, the

procedures implemented to build trustworthiness, and any potential limitations that were identified throughout the research process.

Research Design and Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2012), is best used when a problem or issue requires further exploration. Qualitative research, specifically using narrative practices, empowers individuals to share their voices. Participants feel as if their experiences are being honored and validated when involved in a qualitative study. Furthermore, Creswell suggests that qualitative research is an effective tool to develop theory when partial or inadequate theories already exist (2012). The inquiry model of qualitative research allows for the “messy, human world” while concurrently establishing a deep understanding of social phenomena (Lincoln, 2005, p. 25). Historically, humans are storytelling creatures; qualitative research’s inclination towards “narrative methods” and “narrative reporting formats” (p. 25) encourages its participants to share their experiences in a natural manner.

The constructivist learning theory, the theoretical framework for this study, as explained by Krahenbuhl (2016), is a recent development in the field of cognitive psychology. Constructivism seeks to explain how individuals come to know what they know. Concluding that knowledge is built on the foundation of prior knowledge, constructivism conveys that learning is a result of one’s experiences and ideas. Krahenbuhl’s findings are contrary to epistemological assumptions that knowledge is constructed by the mind as opposed to being discovered. Krahenbuhl further describes constructivist learning theory in education as an environment where active learning is evident and diverse instructional approaches are employed (2016).

Figure 1 demonstrates the four focal characteristics of constructivist learning as referenced in Krahenbuhl's work (2016).



Figure 1. Focal characteristics of constructivist learning.

Creswell outlines social constructivism, the interpretive framework used for this qualitative case study, as a method for seeking understanding of the world in which we work and live (2012). Closely correlated to the developmental theory pioneered by Vygotsky, social constructivism “emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding” (Kim, 2001, p. 17). Social constructivism should be kept “problematic, inviting reconstruction and redefinition [so that] knowledge and sophistication grow” (Guba, 1992, p. 17).

To operate under social constructivism, inquiry is necessary. Prior knowledge does not become truer, knowledge becomes more informed and sophisticated. Qualitative research conducted through the lens of social constructivism should apply complex views as opposed to narrow meanings to encourage participants to offer comprehensive views of a given situation (Creswell, 2012). As the researcher offers the participants open-ended questions, the researcher is able to generate a theory or pattern of meaning. Coupled with the researcher's prior knowledge, personal experiences, and background, a new interpretation is formed. This qualitative case study was also conducted under an axiological philosophical paradigm. Axiological paradigms openly discuss personal and professional values that shape the narrative exchanged between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2012).

A qualitative case study focuses on a real-life contemporary context (Creswell, 2012). Case studies are employed to illustrate a unique case that demands further explanation to better understand a specific issue or concern. The use of a single instrumental case study allowed me, as the researcher, to focus solely on one campus's novice teachers to illustrate an issue of interest to me. Upon collecting and analyzing data, I was able to draw generalizations that future researchers could find beneficial. I chose to conduct a single instrumental case study to solely focus on the working environment, conditions, and novice teachers of Star Elementary.

Setting

The study was conducted in Southwest School District, a large suburban district serving students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The data of the district (pseudonym used) is published on the district's website and is summarized as follows. Located in the Southwest region of the United States, Southwest School District served 3,589 students in the 2018-2019

school year. Table 1 below shows the ethnic distribution of all Southwest School District students in the 2018-2019 school year. Of the approximately 3,600 students that Southwest School District educated in 2018-2019, nearly 73% of the students were economically disadvantaged.

Table 1

Ethnic distribution of Southwest School District students (2018-2019)

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
African American	41.3%
Asian	5.9%
Hispanic	46.5%
American Indian	0.3%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.3%
White	3.6%

Within Southwest School District, Star Elementary was home to approximately 1,400 students from pre-kindergarten to fourth grade in the 2018-2019 school year. TEA provides Star Elementary's student data as two separate groups: Pre-K through first grade as one set of data and second through fourth grade as a separate set of data. Table 2 below shows the ethnic distribution of all students who attended Star Elementary in the 2018-2019 school year in grades Pre-K through first. Of the approximately 630 students Star Elementary served in Pre-K through first grade, 78.4% of the students were economically disadvantaged.

Table 2

Ethnic distribution of Pre-K through 1st grade students in Star Elementary (2018-2019)

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
African American	34.9%
Asian	7.1%
Hispanic	50.3%
American Indian	0.2%
Pacific Islander	0.0%
Two or More Races	2.2%
White	5.4%

Table 3 below shows the ethnic distribution of all students who attended Star Elementary in the 2018-2019 school year in grades second through fourth. Of the nearly 780 students Star Elementary served in second through fourth grade, 78.9% of the students were economically disadvantaged.

Table 3

Ethnic distribution of 2nd through 4th grade students in Star Elementary (2018-2019)

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
African American	41.4%
Asian	5.5%
Hispanic	45.4%
American Indian	0.4%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or More Races	3.6%
White	3.5%

I chose to study Star Elementary because it is the sole elementary campus in Southwest School District. In addition, in the 2018-2019 school year, a new principal was promoted from within the district. In the 2017-2018 school year, the elementary campus became the home for the newly merged primary campus that serviced early childhood through first grade and the former elementary campus that serviced second grade through fourth grade. A final factor that led me to choose Star Elementary, arguably the most notable factor, was that the district's teacher turnover rate for the past several school years far surpassed the state's average teacher turnover rate and had shown fairly steady annual increases. This increase in teacher turnover leading to the 2018-2019 school year propelled me to focus my study on Star Elementary in Southwest School District.

Participant Selection

Creswell (2012) defines purposeful sampling as a method used to select participants who will best assist the researcher in understanding the problem or phenomena being studied. This study mandates two criteria for selected classroom teacher participants. The certified teacher participants in the study included certified classroom teachers who:

1. are either a first- or a second-year teacher.
2. work directly with an instructional coach.

Focusing on the 2018-2019 school year, I identified three first- or second-year teachers among the certified teaching staff at Star Elementary, all of whom worked directly with an instructional coach regularly throughout the school year. The campus principal was contacted as well to participate in an interview so as to gather information from various sources. I also contacted the campus's reading curriculum specialist to triangulate the data collected. I contacted the prospective participants via email (see Appendix A) inquiring if they were willing to participate in a semi-structured interview regarding their experiences as a first- or second-year teacher at Star Elementary, specifically their interactions with the instructional coach. In addition, I asked each classroom teacher to complete a brief four-question survey to gather further information about their professional relationship with their instructional coach. I also reassured the teachers that their identifying information would remain confidential.

Participants

Three prospective participants were identified and selected for this study to represent first- and second-year teachers. Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Southwest School District research requests were approved, I contacted the three teachers at Star Elementary via

email (see Appendix A). In addition to the classroom teachers, the campus principal and reading curriculum specialist were also interviewed in order to garner additional perspectives. Due to the nature of the interview questions and participants' comfort levels, individual interviews were conducted with each participant. Interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes; the classroom teachers participated in two separate interviews whereas the campus leaders participated in one sole interview. The location and time of the interviews were determined based on the participants' schedules and preferences. Interviews were recorded as well as transcribed to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2012).

Data Collection Methods

Creswell explains that the research process for qualitative researchers is emergent, meaning "the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data" (2014, p. 235). From August to September of 2019, the four identified participants engaged in the first of their semi-structured interviews. The location and time of the interviews were determined based on the preferences of the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Interview questions were constructed, based on relevant research, to elicit information from the participating classroom teachers regarding their interactions with the campus's instructional coach, their reasons for continuing to teach at a school with comparatively high turnover, and their level of job satisfaction. The classroom teachers were then interviewed a second time in October of 2019. The interview questions focused on shifts in their experiences from the 2018-2019 school year to the 2019-2020 school year. The interview questions largely

focused on the teachers' relationships with their campus's instructional coaches and how those relationships impacted their professional capacity.

Creswell, (2014) suggests the use of an interview protocol for "asking questions and recording answers" (p. 244). Employing Creswell's suggestions, I prepared an audio recording device to ensure an accurate recollection of the interview was maintained. An interview protocol (see Appendix B) was followed to ensure that standard procedures were used with each teacher interviewee. A separate interview protocol (see Appendix C) was followed for the interview with the campus principal to ensure appropriate standard procedures were used with the campus leader; the same procedure was followed for the curriculum specialist and a separate interview protocol was used (see Appendix D). Throughout the duration of the interviews, my primary role as the interviewer was to ensure the interviewees' comfort, record accurate data and later analyze the data to capture an accurate reflection of the interviewee's experiences. An open-ended questionnaire was also delivered to the three classroom teachers to gather extended responses between the first and second interview (see Appendix O).

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) argues that data collection and analysis are most meaningful when conducted simultaneously. While continuing to conduct interviews, I first transcribed completed interviews. Upon completion of the transcription, I began to identify preliminary trends found within the data. Data was managed and stored in a secure online server without access to outside third parties. Second, I reviewed all collected data as a whole to gain a general impression of what the participants shared. Third, following Tesch's eight steps in the coding process (as

presented by Creswell, 2014), I coded the data gathered through interviews as shown in Figure 2 below.

Tesch's Eight Steps in the Coding Process
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind as you read. 2. Pick one document (i.e., one interview) - the most interesting one, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through asking yourself, "What is this about?" Do not think about the substance of the information but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin. 3. When you have completed this task for several participants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns, perhaps arrayed as major, unique and leftover topics. 4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if new categories and codes emerge. 5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships. 6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes. 7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis. 8. If necessary, recode your existing data.

Figure 2. Tesch's Eight Steps in the Coding Process (as cited in Creswell, 2014).

Upon completion, I classified the codes into three categories: (1) topics in which the participants held shared ideals and experiences, (2) topics in which the participants described varying experiences or differing beliefs, and (3) topics that were unusual that I believed would be of interest to readers.

Next, using the major ideas presented in the coding process, I generated a thorough rendering of the setting, the participants, and the events that occurred during the interviews.

Coding these components of the interviews supported further analysis and identification of a small number of major ideas (Creswell, 2014). I then elected to represent my descriptions and themes in a “narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis” (p. 249). Finally, I interpreted the results to glean what lessons were learned throughout the interview and coding process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the lens of my personal background and experiences, I compared the interviewee’s responses to the relevant literature to reach a final conclusion (Creswell, 2014).

Reflexivity and Positionality

Creswell defines an intrinsic case study as one of particular interest to the researcher (2012). This case study is of particular interest to me due to the connections I have shared with my instructional coaches in the past. Creswell states that a researcher brings their personal experiences into qualitative research and their biases are inherent (2012). I am conscious of the biases, values and experiences I transferred into this research. My personal experiences solidified my desire to make evident the value of effective instructional coaches. In order to elevate the status of instructional coaches so they are deemed necessary at the campus level rather than optional, further research is necessary to determine the level of importance they carry as deemed by Star Elementary teachers. My current position as a curriculum specialist in which I mentor teachers and guide them in their instructional practices also connected me to this research. My experiences working with first- and second- year teachers strengthened my understanding of the participants being studied.

Trustworthiness

One of the most difficult aspects of investigating in social sciences is determining whether an investigation is credible and truthful (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Lincoln and Guba offer two approaches to address the justification of a researcher's interpretations and ensure rigor within a qualitative study. First, a researcher should address trustworthiness; one's interpretations should be credible, transferable, dependable and neutral (as cited in Schwandt, et al., 2007). Second, Lincoln & Guba claim that a researcher's work should also be authentic, described as fair, ontologically authentic, educationally authentic and catalytically authentic. This section will address how the research conducted meets the criteria of trustworthiness as proposed by Schwandt, et al. (2007).

Cope defines credibility as “the truth of the data or the participant views and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher” (2014, p. 89). This study used prolonged engagement as I interacted with each classroom teacher on more than occasion both face to face and virtually. These interactions allowed me to identify “saliencies in the situation” (Schwandt, et al., 2007, p. 18) as different questions were asked during each interaction and the participants' comfort level increased with each exchange. I also employed a form of triangulation as I interviewed various staff members of Star Elementary to gain information from different sources, although the methods and investigator remained the same. To remain objective, I collaborated with a mentor to “assist in developing working hypotheses, develop and test the emerging design and obtain emotional catharsis” (p. 19). Working with a “disinterested professional peer” (p. 19) provided objective insight into the research and aided in keeping biases at bay.

Cope (2014) defines transferability as “findings that can be applied to other settings or groups” (p. 89). This study met the criteria of transferability through its “thick descriptive data” (Schwandt, et al., 2007, p. 19). Through the provision of rich descriptions, a reader can potentially apply findings to a similar situation based on the characteristics described in the research. If upon reading this case study research, a reader deems their professional situation analogous, similar conclusions can be drawn.

Dependability, as defined by Cope (2014), is the “constancy of the data over similar conditions” (p. 89). This single instrumental case study met the criteria of dependability through collaboration amongst professional university staff, researchers and colleagues who act as external, impartial auditors (Schwandt, et al., 2007). At each stage of the research process, conversations occurred to ensure standard procedures were used to allow for possible future replication. The true test of dependability lies in the future if the study is to be replicated with similar findings (Cope, 2014).

Cope (2014) defines authenticity as “the ability and extent to which the researcher expresses the feelings and emotions of the participant’s experiences in a faithful manner” (p. 89). Through the use of audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews, the information presented by the interviewees was accurate and holistic, strengthening the level of authenticity. Likewise, each teacher interviewee was presented with the same interview protocol (see Appendix B) and following survey (Appendix O) and did not experience a different set of questions based on their experiences or position. The protocols only differed when it came to the principal interview so as to ascertain insight on a larger campus scale (see Appendix D). The interview protocol and procedures provided a “balanced view that presents all constructions and the values that

undergird them” (Schwandt, et al., 2007, p. 20). The same procedures that ensure authenticity simultaneously ensure neutrality as biases were removed through constructive dialogue amongst collaborators throughout the research process (Cope, 2014).

Limitations

Some degree of subjectivity is unavoidable (Guba, 1992). Whereas considerable efforts were made to maximize the trustworthiness of this single instrumental case study, limitations inevitably still exist. The first limitation that can be found within this study resides in district funding. While this case study examines the impact, if any, instructional coaches have on teacher retention, not all districts have sufficient funding to staff this position. In this case, the research would not be transferable to such districts who are unable to implement the position of instructional coach.

A second limitation is the participants’ sharing of information. Creswell (2014) alleges “individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (p. 37). As political strategist Lee Atwater famously stated, “perception is reality” and participants, while attempting to share facts, might do so in an overly dramatic manner. Contrarily, participants might also exclude pertinent information throughout the interviews for a host of different reasons. These subjective interpretations or withholding of information can lead to a skewed view of incomplete data.

A third and final limitation of this case study research is that I am a current curriculum specialist myself with instructional coaching responsibilities. Though I am no longer a classroom teacher, I continued to be afflicted by high teacher turnover rates in my current role and seek a solution. My motivation for conducting this research was to attempt to identify a connection

between effective instructional coaches and teacher retention so as to minimize the rate of teacher attrition.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the methods that were used to conduct the single instrumental case study. Upon using purposeful sampling, I conducted interviews with three participants who met the selection criteria, in addition to two campus leaders. Each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview as I collected audio recordings of the participants' experiences. Each participant also completed a follow-up survey garnering additional information. I then applied thematic coding to discern themes among the descriptions participants gave of their experiences working directly with an instructional coach. In addition, a thorough description of data management procedures was provided. Finally, issues related to the trustworthiness of the research design were explained as well as possible solutions to remedy any weaknesses.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine support from an instructional coach and the retention of beginning teachers. The findings of this study are founded upon multiple sources of data including campus and district background information, semi-structured interviews with three teacher participants, the principal and an instructional coach, follow-up interviews, and a questionnaire conducted with the three campus classroom teachers. Each interviewee described her experiences in the 2018-2019 school year as well as her professional relationship with their campus's curriculum specialists. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How would you describe the impact of having direct support from an instructional coach on the retention of beginning teachers?
 - 1a. How important is the effectiveness of an instructional coach on the retention of beginning teachers?
 - 1b. How do participants describe the instructional coaching model and its role in teacher retention?

This chapter first reviews the data collection and analysis methods used. The findings are presented in five separate sections with each section detailing the experiences of a sole educator. I begin each section with a description of the participant's experiences in the 2018-2019 school year. Next, I explain the professional working relationships between each campus educator and the curriculum specialists. I then delve into the experiences of the classroom teachers in the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year as compared to their experiences in the previous year. Finally, I provide a comparative overview of the participants' responses and examine both the

similarities and differences presented by each. In Southwest School District, the position of “curriculum specialist” functions as an instructional coach. On the elementary campus, two curriculum specialists are employed, one to support the language arts and social studies teachers and another to support the mathematics and science teachers. The titles will be used interchangeably throughout the described interviews and data analysis (see Appendix P).

Description of the Setting

A large suburban public school district educating nearly 3,600 students, Southwest School District is home to four Title I campuses: an elementary campus for students in grades Pre-K through fourth, an intermediate campus for students in grades five and six, a middle school campus for students in grades seven and eight, and a high school campus for students in grades nine through twelve. Southwest School District was established in 1981 after the culmination of a four-year battle between a neighboring district regarding transportation routes and educating the residents of Southwest. This information was accessible to the public via the city’s website; however, the information was redacted for the purpose of preserving the school district’s and participants’ anonymity. In 2018-2019, Southwest School District saw approximately 3,600 students enter its doorways to be educated by its 216 full-time teachers. The table below details the district’s student demographics.

Table 4

Southwest School District demographics (2018-2019)

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
African American	41.3%
Asian	5.9%
Hispanic	46.5%
American Indian	0.3%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.3%
White	3.6%

Southwest School District can also be categorized as serving students of which 72.7% were economically disadvantaged, 19.4% were English Language Learners and 8.5% received special education services in the 2018-2019 school year. In addition, the student body can be split nearly down the middle as 50.4% of the students were male and 49.6% of the students were female.

As a district, Southwest School District received a federal rating of a B. A rating of a B, as explained by the TX Schools website operated by TEA, which indicates a district achieved “recognized performance” because many students performed well on the state’s standardized assessment, the district encouraged high academic achievement and/or an appropriate amount of academic growth for most students was achieved. Of the three areas that TEA uses to rate a campus (Student Achievement, School Progress and Closing the Gaps), Southwest School

District was rated similarly in all categories, indicating that certain sub-populations of students met expectations. Southwest School District's ratings in each of these three sections are explained in the table below.

Table 5

Southwest School District 2019 TEA rating as provided to the public by TEA's website,

www.txschools.gov

Category	Explanation	TEA Rating
Student Achievement	How much students know and are able to do at the end of the year	B (recognized performance)
School Progress	How students perform over time and how that growth compares to similar schools	B (recognized performance)
Closing the Gaps	How well different populations of students in a district are performing	B (recognized performance)

Operating solely Title I campuses, Southwest School District has experienced its fair share of teacher turnover. Historically, the district's teacher turnover rates have exceeded the state's average. Table 6 below details the comparison between the state's turnover rates and Southwest School District's. Whereas the state's teacher turnover rate stayed largely stable, Southwest School District's teacher turnover fluctuated in both directions before increasing to 28.9% in the 2018-2019 school year.

Table 6

Southwest School District teacher turnover rates (2015 – 2018)

School Year	Southwest School District's Teacher Turnover Rate	State of Texas' Teacher Turnover Rate
2015-2016	25.9%	16.5%
2016-2017	23.2%	16.4%
2017-2018	28.5%	16.6%

Star Elementary is the single elementary campus for all the Southwest School District. Upon completion of the 2016-2017 school year, the district decided to make a shift and combine its primary campus serving Pre-K through first grade and its elementary campus serving second through fourth grades so that the two campuses could function as one entity. The 2017-2018 school year marked the first year this transition took effect and with this new initiative came common growing pains. After the 2017-2018 school year, the current principal left the position and was later replaced by one of the campus's assistant principals. The beginning of the 2018-2019 school year brought about the second year in which the two campuses were combined into one elementary school and also marked the former assistant principal's first year as acting principal. The interviews discussed later in this chapter provide further information about this tumultuous transition.

Star Elementary educated a wide variety of students in the 2018-2019 school year. The table below details the campus's demographics for the approximately 1,400 total students it served.

Table 7

Star Elementary demographics (2018-2019)

Race/Ethnicity	Pre-K through 1st Percentage	2nd through 5th Percentage
African American	34.9%	41.4%
Asian	7.1%	5.5%
Hispanic	50.3%	45.4%
American Indian	0.2%	0.4%
Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.2%	3.6%
White	5.4%	3.5%

Star Elementary educated Pre-K through first grade students who can be further described as a population in which 78.4% of students were economically disadvantaged, 30% were English Language Learners and 5.8% received special education services. Star Elementary can also be characterized as having served second through fourth grade students, 78.9% of which were economically disadvantaged, 25.4% were English Language Learners and 7.5% received special

education services in the 2018-2019 school year. These students were instructed by approximately 80 full-time teachers.

As a campus, Star Elementary received a federal letter rating of a D. A rating of a D, as explained by the TX Schools website operated by TEA, indicates a campus that “needs improvement” because, according to the data, the campus has served too few students well. Further explained, TEA claims that an insufficient number of students are making adequate academic progress to eventually be prepared for success in the future such as attending college, selecting a career, or entering the military. Of the three areas that TEA uses to rate a campus (Student Achievement, School Progress and Closing the Gaps), Star Elementary was rated lowest in Closing the Gaps. This indicates that certain sub-populations of students did not meet academic expectations on the campus. Star Elementary’s ratings in each of these three sections are explained in the table below.

Table 8

Star Elementary's 2019 TEA rating as provided to the public by TEA's website,

www.txschools.gov.

Category	Explanation	TEA Rating
Student Achievement	How much students know and are able to do at the end of the year	D (needs improvement)
School Progress	How students perform over time and how that growth compares to similar schools	D (needs improvement)
Closing the Gaps	How well different populations of students in a district are performing	F (unacceptable achievement)

Star Elementary's overall performance has shown a decrease from the 2017-2018 school year in which they were rated a B to the 2018-2019 school year in which they received a rating of a D. The table below describes the differences in the state test results as averages for all student groups. Each data entry represents the percentage of students who passed the state standardized assessment. The largest decrease can be seen in the mathematics scores. A slight increase can be observed in the reading scores as well as a slight decrease in the score of all subjects. However, the writing scores stayed the same, showing no change.

Table 9

Comparison of Star Elementary's state standardized test scores (2017-2018 and 2018-2019)

Subject	2017-2018	2018-2019
Math	77%	68%
Reading	60%	66%
Writing	49%	49%
All Subjects	65%	63%

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research had “early roots in anthropology and sociology” (Bhattacharya, p. 8). As researchers studied various cultures and people through the lens of observation and interviews, they attempted to create an in-depth description through their interpretive lens. Marshall quotes Patton (2002) as stating that qualitative reporting contains descriptive data as its goal to display in clear detail the “events of the phenomenon under study” (2014, p. 217-218). In this study, the phenomenon researched is the possible impact instructional coaches have on the retention of teachers early in their careers. Specifically, this case study explores the impact of instructional coaches on new teachers employed at a Title I campus in a district plagued with high turnover rates.

Operating under a constructivist perspective, I attempted to establish the meaning of this phenomenon “from the views of the participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 48). This case study consists of five participants’ involvement in a series of semi-structured interviews as well as a set of follow-up questions collected after the initial interviews were completed. The interviews

included questions regarding typical factors that research has shown lead to teacher attrition as an attempt to paint the picture of the work environment and to determine whether instructional coaching had a significant impact on the participants. The data collection also includes the review of publicly available data provided by TEA pertaining to the campus, such as the district's and campus's academic performance reports, student demographic information, and teacher turnover rates.

Following Tesch's eight-step coding process as outlined in Chapter III, I read all interview transcriptions carefully and took note of interesting topics or trends that developed throughout the transcriptions. Upon completing this once, I reviewed the list of trends I identified and returned to the transcriptions to code the corresponding segments of the interviews. By writing in the margins of the interviews and underlining specific phrases shared by the participants, I was able to see their ideas come together and distinguish between their shared ideas and isolated beliefs. After a final review of the coded data, I separated the information into three categories: data that I had expected based on literature, data that was unexpected, and, finally, data that was unusual that I felt was of interest.

Participant 1: First-Year Teacher at Star Elementary

I met with Ruth Barnes as my first participant on a weekend morning at a local coffee shop. She stepped into the coffee shop early in the morning with an enthusiasm as well as her own notebook and pen to write questions as we progressed through the interview. A mother of two, she is a recent graduate from a local university that is highly regarded for its teacher education program. As Star Elementary experienced multiple transitions within the position of reading specialist in the 2018-2019 school year, Ruth stepped into her current position as a

fourth-grade language arts teacher in the middle of the year when the teacher originally in that role stepped into the position of reading specialist.

As we began our conversation, Ruth expressed her passion for teaching and her dreams of furthering her own education in the future. As an educator completing her first-year of teaching, Ruth stated that she has a passion for learning and her drive to teach is to “instill the love for education in other students.” When asked about her opinion of the level of administrative support she received, she shared that she felt that her administrators could have been a more present fixture in her classroom to provide feedback. When I asked her to be more specific, she said that she wanted feedback from her administrators outside of a formal evaluation so she could ensure that she was reflecting proper teaching procedures in her classroom. Ruth shared positive facts about the professional development she received at the start of her position and that she felt well prepared. One area that Ruth expressed dissatisfaction was with the mentoring program that was made available to her. Ruth shared that the meetings with her mentor were “really small” and focused on “general, basic questions.” Her primary concern was the mentor teacher’s availability:

...it was kind of like, “Hey, do you mind helping her out [here] and there?” but of course it was another teacher [who has] their own classroom and stuff that’s going on too. Like I discussed before, the administrative team didn’t really do pop-ins so it would have been great if there was a mentor that [said], “Oh, I can sit in your classroom for a couple minutes and watch you do a lesson and give you feedback on that.”

When probed regarding the types of discussions Ruth had with her informal mentor, she stated that they discussed logistical questions such as scheduling and how to create small group

stations. She communicated that she felt these meetings, while not incredibly beneficial, made her feel as if she “could function.”

In discussing her students’ academic performance, Ruth noted that the students she inherited midyear were academically “low.” When describing her class’s demographic breakdown, she detailed that she had mostly African American and Hispanic students with few students of other ethnicities, similar to the school’s overall demographic breakdown. She also had a few students receiving special education services in her classroom as well as English language learners. While they might have been academically low when she began her teaching position, she proudly shared that she was able to see growth in some of her students in the short time she had taught them. An effort made by the school to address academic concerns, as disclosed by Ruth, was the initiative of tutoring pull-outs. The students were helped “mostly for reading” so they could receive “individualized attention” as well as some instruction for writing. Ruth felt that this initiative was supportive of her efforts in the classroom and appreciated the effort by the pull-out teachers as these efforts were focused on grade levels that participated in the state’s standardized testing.

I then questioned Ruth regarding her level of satisfaction with her teacher salary. With a smile, she shared that, as compared to student teaching and “making zero,” she looked at her first teaching paycheck and thought to herself, “This is gonna work.” She did stipulate that although Southwest School District might not be the highest paying district in the area, there are other aspects of the district that she values more than a heftier paycheck:

What I value at Southwest School District is, because we know everybody, it’s such a small district, the superintendent can come into your classroom at any time. You know

people that are way up on the pyramid, you know, all the way from down the middle. I feel as though everybody can kind of be a big family. Like, even for professional development, we're meeting teachers that are [at] the high school, intermediate school and middle school as well so it's not just that you're stuck on [your] campus. And because it's so small, you know of have a chance to meet everybody opposed to if you go to a big district, and there's so many elementary schools, so many middle schools, you don't have a chance to really reach out to anyone.

We then moved on to discussing the culture and climate of the 2018-2019 school year. Ruth divulged that the climate was "a little bit stressful" because it appeared as if many teachers had "given up" towards the end of the year. She shared that "the negative started to come out" and was evident because teachers claimed that their students were "too far gone" and that "administrators [were] not doing anything about it." Frustrated, Ruth revealed that the teachers who felt this way began "missing days" at work, and oftentimes, there was not a substitute to cover their class, causing additional strain on the teachers who were left to split their class and take in extra students. Ruth also shared that she felt some of the veteran teachers on the campus "gave up because they were out of their comfort zone." Ruth attributed this in part to the campus principal being new to her position and asking for what some teachers felt like were unattainable results. They gave the appearance of not wanting to "work as hard as they should have." Through these times, Ruth stated that she remained positive through the practice of self-reflection and believing that "every day is a new day."

In describing her professional relationship with the campus's reading specialist, Ruth reported that she felt she could share her opinion with the reading specialist due to the

“comfortable vibe” in their working relationship. Due to the smaller campus size, Ruth felt she had the opportunity to be “personable but still [work with the reading specialist] on a professional level.” Ruth’s team and the reading specialist met together for PLCs every Thursday to receive direct instructional support along with additional planning meetings that were scheduled to meet everyone’s schedules. Ruth described the reading specialist’s responsibilities as providing individualized training on what teachers needed and working with students when teachers required additional support.

At this point in the interview, I provided Ruth with a description of three proven effective methods of instructional coaching and asked her to review them so she could determine which model(s) her reading specialist most closely aligned to (see Appendix F). Upon reading the descriptions, Ruth selected Elena Aguilar’s Inquiry Based and Cognitive Coaching as the model that her reading specialist exemplified. Ruth described their interactions as focusing on reviewing and evaluating assessments. The reading specialist would “review with [the teachers] some of the specific skills the students needed the most help with.” When I asked if she considered her reading specialist to be effective in her position, Ruth responded by saying “Very effective, yes.” She expanded on the reading specialist’s abilities by adding that she also provided professional development and attempted to improve teachers’ skills on the campus.

As the interview began to close, I asked Ruth what factors led to her decision to remain at Star Elementary in light of some of the present aspects that are commonly tied to teacher attrition. She shared that the “closeness,” “access to multiple pathways...as far as the hierarchy” and the fact that the “positive things [outweighed] the negative” all drew her to staying at Star Elementary for the next school year. In spite of a new principal and frustrations that came with

being asked to implement new teaching strategies, her decision to continue her career at her campus remained steadfast. She repeatedly spoke of the “closeness in the staff” and the family feel of her campus. Furthermore, she spoke of her own passion for learning and her desire to eventually work her way to a position in instructional leadership; she felt that Southwest School District could provide her the ladder to reach these goals.

The interview ended with my asking Ruth to reflect on her relationship with the reading specialist on her campus and if the specialist had an impact on her decision to continue teaching at Star Elementary. She responded with a resounding positive answer:

It definitely did because my specialist is so, I guess you could say hands on, and just willing to help you and assist with anything and I feel like the support is there. Because maybe if you go to a bigger campus, the support might be spread thin or, you know, you might not be able to get that access to them.

She also noted that the reading specialist on her campus had the resources to meet teachers’ needs and made them feel as if they were a priority.

Upon completion of the twenty-nine-minute interview, I administered a follow-up survey online before the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, Ruth’s second year teaching. Ruth’s feelings regarding her professional relationship with the reading specialist remained the same as she shared that she and her curriculum specialist have “an amazing professional relationship.” She felt that their relationship in the 2019-2020 school year did not differ from their relationship in the 2018-2019 school year. Ruth also expressed that her relationship with the reading specialist will impact her teaching capacity by easing “many of the stressors teachers normally encounter.” Like the end of the 2018-2019 school year, when asked if Ruth foresees her

professional relationship with the reading specialist impacting her decision to remain at her campus at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, she responded, “Yes, of course.”

Ruth and I met a second time two months later in which I conducted a phone interview with her on a Monday evening at the beginning of a busy work week. I focused my questions on Ruth’s second year of teaching and how the 2019-2020 school year compared to her first teaching experience in the 2018-2019 school year. Ruth began by disclosing that her school year could be summarized in two words: “intense” and “rewarding.” Ruth mentioned that deadlines and “so many things to turn in” caused chaos at the time; however, she credited her students’ growth as providing her fulfillment in her position. Ruth also noted that her school year was markedly different than the year before as she was able to begin the school year with the students as opposed to starting in the middle of the school year:

...it’s great because I feel like this is like my actual classroom this point around. Because when I came in midyear, you know, sometimes I would still feel like it was the other teacher’s class. It was great to just be able to customize the entire classroom, you know, down to the furniture and how things were set up. Even just implementing my own rules instead of having to, like, walk around the other teacher’s rules just so it wouldn’t be such a big change for the students.

Ruth shared that her ability to establish her own routines and procedures with her students impacted the beginning of her school year in a tremendously positive way.

I then asked Ruth if her feelings remained the same regarding the factors that contributed to her decision to continue teaching at Star Elementary. Ruth shared that her feelings had in fact remained consistent; she added that the district mentoring program she participated in during the

current school year also impacted her capacity as a teacher. Ruth proudly mentioned that a district curriculum specialist conducted a walkthrough observation in her classroom and gave Ruth positive feedback regarding her teaching. As part of the district's mentoring program, the campus curriculum specialists also attend the meetings in addition to district personnel. Ruth shared that she felt supported by the presence of these professionals. When discussing the culture in the new school year, Ruth happily responded that the culture had seen a "dramatic shift." Though many teachers left at the end of the 2018-2019 school year, Ruth shared, they were replaced by teachers who expressed "a really positive vibe."

We next transitioned to discussing Ruth's professional relationship with her curriculum specialist. She noted that their relationship operated similarly to the previous year and she received support through planning meetings, PLCs, and providing resources such as a curriculum pacing guide. Ruth specifically noted that the reading specialist had implemented a calendar that included days designated for reteaching concepts and reviewing previously taught concepts. Ruth felt this procedure was "a breath of fresh air" because the time allotted to solidifying content for students had become a part of their regular routine. Ruth also included that the curriculum specialist was available to "clarify if [teachers had] any questions about how in-depth" to teach a certain skill. Ruth attributed these curriculum decisions to the fact that the reading specialist was aware of a teacher's role in the classroom and the struggles that teachers face. She continued by stating that her relationship with the reading specialist continued to improve because the specialist was able to "provide more resources" for teachers as she continued to familiarize herself with the campus materials. Ruth also noted that she appreciated the reading specialist's accessibility and how she was able to reach the specialist through various modes.

I next reminded Ruth that when asked which effective instructional coaching model she felt the reading specialist mirrored, she responded with Elena Aguilar's Inquiry Based and Cognitive Coaching model. I asked Ruth if her thoughts on this had remained the same; she answered that she still believed the reading specialist mirrored these practices. Ruth reflected that the reading specialist had recently led a PLC on the campus in which the principal shared that all students' learning needs were to be addressed, including highly successful students. Upon stating this expectation, the reading specialist assisted the teachers in creating classroom resources to encourage students to continue learning after completing an assignment. Ruth stated that "the way that [the campus teachers] know what [their] kids need is from just data and trying new things." She stressed the importance of aligning assessments with the taught curriculum and noted how supported she felt by these actions the reading specialist took. Ruth credited this effective model of instructional coaching as a factor that brought her back to Star Elementary. When asked if the curriculum specialists on the campus followed a specific coaching cycle or series of steps in planning meetings, Ruth shared that the campus did not currently follow such procedures; however, she was unsure "what the future holds" in terms of following a coaching cycle. Ruth spoke of the consistency that the reading specialist provided her by following Aguilar's coaching model:

It kind of lets me know what to expect and it may be easier that it's one less thing that has to be changed in my daily schedule or in my daily teaching. It's kind of like I already know what to expect.

Ruth also reiterated her statement that the reading specialist provided motivation for her to return to her campus at the end of the school year. She shared that the reading specialist supported her

using data analyses and making instructional decisions so that Ruth could “better equip [herself] with more effective techniques and strategies that [she could] use to teach those skills and subjects.” Confident that Star Elementary is a “growing campus,” Ruth believed that the relationship that she has with the reading specialist provides her opportunities to grow and “better [herself] in [the] profession.”

I moved forward to question Ruth about the importance of effectiveness, in her opinion. I provided her a scenario in which the reading specialist was evaluated and deemed to be ineffective. Ruth emphatically responded that an evaluation completed by another professional “would not make an impact”:

...you know, some people have their own opinion. You have your own opinion and your own experiences with people. So, if my experience with that person is a great one, it would be really hard for me to change that idea unless that person were to change that idea. So I would have to see that, not just hear it, even though I would hear that from an administrator. I would still have to see that for myself.

I then probed further and asked Ruth which held more importance to her in her role as a classroom teacher: the relationship she has with a curriculum specialist or the effectiveness of said curriculum specialist. Ruth’s response was twofold:

...it kind of feels like my answer is leaning towards both. Of course, before we even started implementing her skills, you know, of course you have to meet this person before you actually start getting into the feel of working with them. ...although she’s a really good person, she’s also a really good specialist so I wouldn’t say that it’s just because I

like her as a person, that's the reason why I prefer her as my specialist. It's also because she is very skillful.

Ruth went on to mention that the reading specialist pushed her to grow professionally. When considering their strong personal relationship as well, Ruth felt that this maximized the impact the reading specialist had on her capacity and performance as an educator.

Participant 2: Second-Year Teacher at Star Elementary

I met with Nicole Collins, the second participant, on a weekend early afternoon at a local coffee shop. A mother in her twenties to a little boy, we got to know each other a little bit while discussing our children and parenting experiences. Nicole is a current self-contained first-grade teacher at Star Elementary who completed her second year of teaching in the 2018-2019 school year. Nicole was instantly very open about her experiences at Star Elementary, both positive and negative. In her thirty-three-minute interview, we instantly struck a rapport as she opened up about her teaching beliefs and aspirations for the following school year.

I initiated the conversation by asking Nicole what led her to a career in education and learning more about her. Taking an unconventional route, Nicole explained that she initially began her college journey studying a different major that would have led her to the corporate world. However, an early marriage and a young pregnancy encouraged her to change her course after college. She stated that she thought "teaching would always be a good option" for her later in life as it would provide a "lifestyle balance" so she would be able to spend time with her family at home. As she began to lean toward a career in education, Nicole said it made sense to her because "educating has always been in [her] blood":

I've always worked with kids, even in my own community; I've tutored kids since I was 13. I've tutored all my nieces and nephews any time they needed help with homework, even the ones starting college. My grandmother was actually a teacher back where my mother is from in Bangladesh. She actually opened up a school for orphans and stuff. So it's like different things like that added up and accumulated to me being like, "You know what? Let me try teaching."

Nicole also commented that she felt teaching was a steady job that would allow her to retire in the future as opposed to other jobs where one could work "until [they're] dead." She shared that she felt it was a better decision to teach rather than follow her original career path. Upon graduating from college, Nicole entered an alternative certification program and began applying for jobs in the summer after she completed the program. However, late that summer her area experienced a natural disaster. Due to a series of unfortunate events, Nicole did not begin her first year teaching until October of 2017 when she came on as an employee at Star Elementary.

I then focused on the 2018-2019 school year and questioned Nicole about the level of administrative support she felt she received in the 2018-2019 school year. Nicole shared she did not feel her administrators were present. While they were "very nice" and "always very caring," Nicole believed that the fact that the principal was new to the position was a factor in the lack of present leadership. Nicole attributed this partially to the principal trying to "fix everything at once" from the past school year. In the 2017-2018 school year, Nicole's first year teaching, Star Elementary transitioned from being a separate primary campus serving Pre-K through first grade students and an elementary campus serving second through fifth grade students to one campus serving all of the district's Pre-K through fourth grade students. The first year of this transition,

Nicole stated that there had been a “different principal and she had been principal for a little while before that” when the elementary school operated as two separate campuses. Nicole described the transition as a period with “a lot of issues in the sense of getting everything put together” and “being called one school instead of two.” Nicole attributed the lack of administrative presence to the task the principal was faced with in terms of continuing the transition that began in the 2017-2018 school year and attempting to smooth over the residual complications. Due to the level of the challenge, Nicole felt that the administrators were “focused on fixing” and “didn’t spend enough time with the teachers” to establish quality relationships.

Next, Nicole reported that she believed the professional development she received in the 2018-2019 school year was “actually pretty good” and provided her with tools necessary to do her job well. She specifically mentioned the high-quality mathematics professional development that was provided to her by the mathematics specialist at Star Elementary; Nicole explained that it provided her with hands-on ways to teach her students that she felt able to implement when the school year began. She also expressed that she felt the reading and writing professional development was a little “rushed.” Disappointed by this experience since the campus’s deficits, according to Nicole, lie in the language arts area, Nicole shared she would have “liked a bigger focus on the reading and writing inservice.” As the campus was “pushing Daily 5,” Nicole confessed that she as a new teacher was unaware of how to implement small group instruction and that the professional development surrounding that topic was lacking. Nicole also divulged that she would have liked to see more training on classroom management:

I know they tell all teachers if you need help with classroom management, go take [a training] individually on your own but maybe for them to have a whole school classroom management [training] because as an entire school we face a lot of behavior issues. It makes it very hard for teachers because we get frustrated so easily because if you're dealing with students who can't read or write and then on top of that they have behavioral issues, it's a very hard task. It's not [impossible] but it just makes it ten times harder to do it.

At this point in the interview, Nicole began discussing the transitions that the campus had seen in the position of reading specialist. Nicole shared that the former reading specialist left the campus at the end of the 2017-2018 school year so the summer before the 2018-2019 school year began, the campus was in the process of hiring a new reading specialist. In the interim, the superintendent's wife filled the role. A veteran teacher skilled in reading and writing, the superintendent's wife acted "like a mentor" and helped the teachers on campus by working alongside them and providing trainings over the summer, Nicole added. To summarize the professional development she received, Nicole compared the two years she had worked at Star Elementary. She stated that she did not receive professional development when she started teaching in October of 2017; because of this, she had high hopes for the professional development in the summer of 2018. However, she felt "underwhelmed" as if "they were just trying to hit a little bit of everything" but did not focus on any topic in depth.

When asked about the district's mentoring program, Nicole shared that in her first year of teaching, her mentor "is one of the reasons why [she] survived the school year." Nicole credited "surviving" her first year of teaching to her mentor and her assistant principal at the time who

later became principal of the elementary campus. When I asked Nicole if any kind of mentoring continued in her second year of teaching, 2018-2019, she said she no longer received mentoring services as she was no longer considered a new teacher. However, she expressed vehemently that she felt she should have continued receiving mentoring services, outside of the friendships she had established with her co-workers, because she began in October of 2017 and not in August at the beginning of the school year.

I then asked Nicole to provide a breakdown of her students for 2018-2019. Nicole compared them to her class from the year before and stated that they were “even lower.” Nicole also shared that her team informed her after she had first started teaching that the teachers were told to “get rid of whatever kids” they felt was necessary. Because of this decision-making power that was given to the teachers, Nicole recalled that she had 19 boys and 4 girls which created a “terrible class” her first year of teaching. As compared to that group of students, her students in 2018-2019 were academically lower. She noted that she had two students in the Gifted and Talented program as well as one English language learner and one student who received special education services. She estimated 90% of her students entered her classroom reading below grade level. Nicole pointed out a discrepancy between the reporting of the kindergarten teachers who all stated that the students were on level at the end of the previous year; however, this was at odds with Nicole’s findings at the beginning of the year. Nicole went into further detail about her group of students:

Throughout the school year, I noticed that the group of kids I got last year was similar to the group of kids I got my first year. I don’t know, it might be a myth, but all first-year teachers or new teachers always get the bad class and I guess I got that two years in a

row. To be honest, everyone in the first grade was like, “Oh, we don’t know how you deal with these kids.” I had a lot of special cases of different kids who have home issues and all that so their academics were really low.

Throughout the time Nicole spent describing her students from 2018-2019, her frustrations were evident as she spoke quickly and seemed to be releasing pent-up emotions. She stressed the importance of support at home and lamented the lack of parental involvement she saw for her students as evidenced by communication folders that went untouched. She ended this segment of the interview by expressing pride in growing her students several reading levels although at the end of the school year, they were still not at a level considered appropriate for the end of first grade. Her focus on progress as opposed to achievement ended the description of her students on a positive note.

Nicole and I then moved on to discuss her teacher salary. She expressed that if judging on a scale of “1 to 10,” she would judge her salary “a 4.” In her belief, no teacher is paid enough when considering the amount of work that is done daily and the “situations and the cases” that teachers encounter in their classrooms. Nicole referred to her own family, claiming that teachers have to “leave [their] family for the whole day and [their] own kids to come spend time with other kids to try to educate” and “help them.” She felt that her teaching salary did not account for the sacrifice she felt she was making in terms of her own family life. On the heels of discussing her students and some negative feelings that brought to light as well as her disappointment in her salary, I asked Nicole what kept her coming back to Star Elementary. Her response identified two primary factors in her retention, the first of which was her compassion for her students:

I look at these kids and I'm a mom also, so I understand what a lot of them are going through and a lot of them have things beyond their control. Their outbursts in class, their anger, their temper tantrums are not necessarily coming because they're at school. They could be home related. That was one thing that our administration did, they pushed a lot of build relationships with these kids...I would know everything about these kids in and out. There's hundreds of people probably who could do it but not that many people want to come out to a school district where there's so many behavior [concerns], our performance is low, our student population is... socioeconomically low... a lot of people are not going to want to go there. But there's something inside of me [that says] no matter what I go through all year, helping and seeing them at the end of the year crying... it makes it worth it.

Nicole's second primary factor for returning to Star Elementary was her first-grade team of teachers who were "amazing." Nicole stated that their relationships were so strong that the teachers were some of her "best friends" and they maintained relationships outside of school as well.

At this point, we took a brief break in the interview. I used this as a transition point to shift the conversation to the overall climate and culture of Star Elementary. Nicole conveyed that the climate overall at Star Elementary was positive and that staff members were very close. She proudly shared that "everyone was always kind of there for each other because [they are] such a small campus" and even when battling a "dip in morale," the staff "knew [they] were in it together." Nicole also mentioned that if a teacher were to go outside of their grade level to seek advice or suggestions, teachers were more than willing to assist their co-workers.

As a self-contained teacher, Nicole had the opportunity to work with both the mathematics and reading specialist so she was able to offer insight regarding how the two specialists worked alongside their teachers. As a member of the science planning team, she worked closer with the mathematics specialist so she began discussing their professional relationship first:

She was very present; she was always there. She was able to always be at every single one of our PLC meetings and she was there besides that if you just emailed her or called her. I remember that one of our teachers had given a test and all her kids bombed it and she sat there with the math specialist, she went over every single question... So she was very present, she was always there for us, for the whole team. She would go to the math planning team's meetings every week.

In addition, Nicole added that if there were ever a time when she needed additional resources or manipulatives, the mathematics specialist was able to provide them to her immediately. Due to these reasons, Nicole claimed that the mathematics specialist played a large role in her decision to return to Star Elementary for the 2019-2020 school year. Unfortunately, Nicole revealed that the mathematics specialist had sought another position over the summer and was not returning; she feared this would have a negative impact on her teaching experience in the coming school year. When discussing the reading specialist, Nicole reported that while she believed the reading specialist "[tried] her hardest" and "definitely [tried] her best" in 2018-2019, she was new to the role and therefore inexperienced in how to assist teachers throughout the campus.

In concluding the interview, I asked Nicole if she felt that having direct support from an instructional coach affected her decision to remain at Star Elementary. Nicole responded that having a strong specialist in any content area is impactful:

It makes a teacher want to come back because if you know that the specialists are there and they have their stuff together, that even if your kids are struggling in your class, you at least have the backing and the support and the resources to help them. But if the specialists are not up to par, then it makes it harder for you to want to come back because of the fact that your kids are struggling and the person you're supposed to turn to is not there all the way to be able to provide you with the support.

Nicole reiterated how she had been looking forward to coming back to work further with the mathematics specialist and was incredibly disappointed to find she was not returning. Nicole expressed that she had high expectations for the reading specialist in 2019-2020 and hoped to see an improvement in her abilities as she likely received "a lot more training" after the end of the 2018-2019 school year. Nicole also took this opportunity to repeat her feelings regarding the superintendent's wife who stepped into the role of reading specialist and explain once again explain the effect her support had on Nicole's teaching capacity. She concluded by agreeing that although the superintendent's wife was not officially titled a curriculum specialist, someone taking the responsibilities of that role makes an impact regardless of title. Nicole's final statement reflected that "having a good specialist... it makes a huge impact on not only us but the students also."

When provided with the three examples of effective instructional coaching models (see Appendix F), Nicole answered that her mathematics specialist was most aligned to Duessen's

Teacher-Oriented Coaching model as the mathematics specialist worked with the teachers in groups. Nicole shared that this led to the entire team feeling as if their voices were heard because they were each able to provide input rather than only a few teachers speaking on the team's behalf. As she mirrored an effective coaching practice, Nicole determined that the mathematics specialist was effective in her role.

As we began to conclude the interview, I questioned Nicole about the factors that led her to return to Star Elementary next year. As we had previously discussed some topics she had negative feelings about, I was especially interested to hear her reasons for returning to her campus. She shared that the mathematics specialist was a strong factor in her decision to return due to being "so strong in math" in terms of "planning and resources." Unfortunately, Nicole also shared that the mathematics specialist sought different employment over the summer and would not be returning for the 2019-2020 school year. She also mentioned that while the reading specialist was "fairly new" to her position, Nicole felt that the reading specialist "was trying her hardest" and also "trying her best" to support teachers in 2018-2019.

In conclusion, I asked Nicole for her thoughts regarding having direct support from a curriculum specialist and if she felt it had an impact on her retention. Nicole shared definitely that the specialists had an impact on her:

I definitely think having a strong specialist in math, science, reading or anything makes a teacher want to come back because if you know that the specialists are there and they have their stuff together, that even if your kids are struggling in your class, you at least have the backing and the support and the resources to help them.

She also voiced that if a specialist is not effective in his or her role, it makes it more challenging for a teacher to decide to return due to an anticipated lack of support. Nicole concluded her interview by stating that “having a good specialist... makes a huge impact on not only [teachers] but the students also.”

Upon completion of Nicole’s interview, I administered a follow-up survey online before the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, Nicole’s third year teaching. Nicole’s feelings regarding her professional relationship with the reading specialist had not seemed to improve as she had hoped, as shared during her interview. Nicole stated that they currently have “very little contact” although the reading specialist is “available when needed.” She felt that their relationship in the 2019-2020 school year did not differ from their relationship in the 2018-2019 school year, although she did note that the reading specialist seems “much more knowledgeable” as opposed to the previous school year. Nicole divulged that the campus has yet to hire a new mathematics specialist to replace the effective and highly regarded mathematics specialist who supported teachers in 2018-2019. She expressed concern that her teaching capacity will be impacted negatively due to the lack of a mathematics specialist currently employed on the campus. Like the end of the 2018-2019 school year, when asked if Nicole foresees her professional relationship with the curriculum specialists impacting her decision to remain at her campus at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, she responded, “Yes, it could impact the choice to stay.”

Two months later, I spoke with Nicole a second time over the phone on a Thursday afternoon after she attended a meeting after school. As she drove home that afternoon, we spoke about her experiences thus far in the 2019-2020 school year. I began by reviewing the purpose of

the study and asking how Nicole's school year was progressing thus far. Nicole happily shared that she was enjoying the start to her school year and felt that she had a "much better grasp on the students and how to teach" as compared to her previous two years of teaching. I reminded her of the factors she credited for her decision to remain at her campus, specifically her strong team, supportive co-workers and the effective mathematics curriculum specialist. When asked if her feelings regarding those factors had remained the same, Nicole shared that she continued to feel supported by her team and colleagues. However, since the mathematics curriculum specialist had left the campus, Nicole shared that she felt the teachers on the campus were "struggling" and the lack of effective and experienced curriculum specialists on the campus was "making a big impact on the way [teachers were] feeling about [the] curriculum." Nicole mentioned that nearly two months into the 2019-2020 school year, Star Elementary had just hired a new mathematics curriculum specialist to replace the professional who resigned the previous summer.

Nicole described the new mathematics specialist as helpful in the way of providing station activities for students; however, Nicole stated that while the mathematics specialist continued to familiarize herself with the campus and its routines, the mathematics specialist tasked the teachers with the responsibility of asking for help. Nicole felt that the mathematics specialist would have been more effective if she had been able to recognize teachers' needs. In regard to the campus's reading specialist, Nicole "still [thought] she [had] a long way to go" before Nicole would feel comfortable utilizing the reading specialist as an instructional resource:

...we're a school that has a very, like, our reading scores are very low. That's the number one thing that we're struggling with as a whole campus. She's supposed to be the specialist for Pre-K through sixth. It seems like it's a lot more of a challenge and there are

things that teachers are wanting, and we're needing, and resources that we're asking for, and we're just not getting it, to be honest.

I then moved forward to question Nicole regarding her opinion on the campus's climate and culture in the new school year. She optimistically reflected on the beginning of the year and stated that "it [went] really well." Nicole described the beginning of the year inservice as a time rife with teacher bonding and relationship building activities. Nicole also mentioned that "administrators were included in it with the teachers" and the school year began with a "really, really good start." However, Nicole shared that as the year progressed, the teachers felt overwhelmed with district assessments, campus assessments and other "crunch time" deadlines. Nicole noted that it seemed that the administrators reverted to routines and procedures from the year before rather than continuing the positive changes they had implemented at the beginning of the year:

It's just a lot of things being thrown at teachers and a lot of, like, "Okay, here you go. Go figure it out." It's really stressful because there are a lot of things as a teacher, yes, we have to do, but there are lot of things from the specialists that we're expecting them to be able to provide for us and we're not getting that.

While Nicole recognized that the curriculum specialists were "stretched thin" due to their multitude of responsibilities, she also reflected that the climate of the campus had shifted as they got further into the school year and deadlines began to approach.

I then asked Nicole to describe her professional relationship with the campus's two curriculum specialists in the 2019-2020 school year. She reiterated that while she understands they are stretched thin between various responsibilities, she feels unsupported as a teacher. She

stated that this had been a shift since the previous year due to a change in the role of mathematics curriculum specialist. However, she explained that she expected more of the reading curriculum specialist as she had a semester in addition to a summer's worth of training to receive job training. Nicole expressed that she had grown "more vocal" and "more direct" in terms of "expecting more" of the reading specialist. While she recognized that might appear "needier" as opposed to the previous year, Nicole justified her actions by stating that she was responsible for the learning of 21 students with different strengths and areas of need. Therefore, the need for materials to encourage student growth took precedence and she felt comfortable asking for more of the reading curriculum specialist.

I moved on to ask Nicole if she felt supported by the curriculum specialists in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of the curriculum. She disclosed that she did not feel supported by the reading specialist due to the specialist admitting she was not familiar with the new textbook adoption the campus had received. Nicole shared that "there [was] so much going on that [the teachers] kind of [needed] her guidance to figure out" how to best utilize the resource. She included that she also did not feel supported by the mathematics curriculum specialist; however, she attributed that to the fact that the specialist was both new to the district and the position itself. Nicole noted that while the mathematics curriculum specialist had yet to model lessons for teachers, she had provided various materials and handouts for teachers to use in the classroom and had also participated in "a few of the math planning sessions" the team had held thus far.

I probed further and questioned Nicole regarding consistent supports that the curriculum specialists provided to support teachers in their instructional practices. Nicole focused solely on the reading specialist for this question:

Let me think really hard on that one... the one thing I guess she regularly does is she does ask us every time we do see her, like, you know, what materials we need, what resources we need. So... when we do get with her when she is available to come to our PLCs or our planning periods and stuff, she does ask what resources we need so she kind of keeps checking on us.

Nicole specified that the reading specialist was “good at regularly checking up and seeing what things” teachers needed; however, Nicole also felt that there was a “miscommunication” between the reading specialist and the teachers because although the teachers shared their specific needs, the reading specialist often did not deliver.

The interview then focused on the coaching model that Nicole had chosen at the initial interview as a model that her curriculum specialists closely followed. I reminded Nicole that she had chosen the model of teacher-oriented coaching in a group setting. I asked Nicole if the curriculum specialists following this model would impact her decision to remain at her campus. Nicole shared that if she were to participate in meaningful discussions with the curriculum specialists regarding how her students performed on certain objectives and then create targeted lesson plans to address students’ areas of weakness, “that would really help” and “impact [her] to want to stay.” However, Nicole claimed that if planning meetings did not follow such a model, she would be motivated “to definitely want to leave” due to not receiving “a lot of good support and the help” teachers desired:

...that's the frustrating portion of it. So, I think if they were to spend more one-on-one time with us and try to help us out and plan with us and help us with our data and just help us with strategies, I think that would definitely make me want to stay. But, currently, unfortunately, it's not going that way. That's an issue we're facing.

Nicole concluded her response by sharing that an effective coaching model would impact the growth of her students.

I then questioned Nicole about the importance of effectiveness, in her opinion. I proposed a scenario in which the curriculum specialists were deemed to be ineffective. Nicole said this would affect her view of the specialists because she felt the administrators would "finally [see] what we're kind of seeing." Nicole expressed hope that, if this were to be the case at Star Elementary, the administrative team would then seek further training for the curriculum specialists or even replace them with trained professionals. Nicole felt this would alleviate pressure on the teachers as the principal would see what teachers were "lacking" and "missing out on." When asked if the curriculum specialists on campus followed a specific coaching cycle, Nicole shared that the reading specialist followed "portions of it" such as unit planning and creating unit assessments. Nicole expressed that this affected her capacity as a teacher:

Yes, it most definitely does impact us as teachers because it's very difficult when we don't have the, you know, the individualized attention. When we're only getting a piece of her to do, like, a little bit and then she's not doing the rest and the rest is put on us, and then we're waiting... it becomes very hard to keep up and teach. ... I think it would make an impact on me as a teacher if we had a better system put in place and it would really help me feel comfortable.

In regard to the mathematics curriculum specialist, Nicole stated that she felt she “[couldn’t] really speak” because “she [was] very new” and “[hadn’t] had much time” to familiarize herself with the campus. Nicole reiterated her feelings that a lack of a full coaching cycle implemented on the campus would affect her decision to return to Star Elementary because, considering “reading [was] the main focus,” she felt unable to meet her full potential as a teacher without the support of a fully effective curriculum specialist.

I concluded the interview by asking Nicole which held more importance in her eyes: effectiveness of an instructional coach or the personal relationship she formed with the coach. Nicole emphatically claimed “the relationship [was] not as important as how effective” the curriculum specialists were:

At the end of the day, even if I don’t like you, if you know your stuff and you’re on top of it and you can help me, that is going to help my kids. ... I could be your best friend all day but if you have no clue what you’re doing, that doesn’t help my kids at all. ... we’re only teaching so that we can improve the lives of these kids and have them reading and be able to move on up in life. I think a specialist needs to be effective because you’re not just touching one kid’s life, you’re having to change a whole grade level or a whole school so you have to be able to keep up with that and I think effectiveness is way more important than a ... personal relationship.

Nicole mentioned that she did not want it to seem that she was “bashing” the curriculum specialists on the campus. Rather, she felt strongly that in order for the students of Star Elementary to grow academically, the teachers desperately needed “somebody supportive” to

assist in those endeavors. Nicole believed that until the campus staffed professionals with sufficient “knowledge” and “background,” the campus would “continue to struggle.”

Participant 3: First-Year Teacher at Star Elementary

I met with Allison Davis to conduct an interview on a Saturday afternoon at Star Elementary. Allison graciously took a break from working in her classroom to sit down with me for a thirty-three-minute interview. While her son and nephew played in her classroom, we sat down and began to discuss her experiences in the 2018-2019 school year, her first year of teaching. Allison, a third-grade mathematics and science teacher, shared that her father was her inspiration to pursue a career in education. In a journey filled with determination and grit, Allison first worked in corporate America upon graduating with her teaching degree from college because Allison “had to get a job” to support herself and her son until she could pass her certification exams and make her way to the classroom “where [she] really wanted to be.”

I next inquired about the level of administrative support Allison felt she had in 2018-2019. Allison quickly replied that she felt the administrative team was “very, very supportive” and referenced their “open door policy” which made her feel as if they were always available to support her. Allison also described that the administrators could be seen “frequently in the hallways” and were open to being asked questions any time. Allison also took the time to note that she felt supported both in terms of curriculum and student behavior. She referred to one specific incident with a student when she required immediate support from administrators. She was proud to say that the administrators “came right to [her] room as soon as [she] called them” to assist her in addressing the situation.

I then questioned Allison regarding the professional development she received. Allison responded slowly at first, sharing that she found the professional development to initially be “a little overwhelming” as she worked to find her niche on her campus. She added that what provided her the most support were her fellow teammates. She continually stated that she had a “very positive experience” and her first year of teaching “was amazing.” She passionately described her team as a group of “people that took care of [her].” As her team was able to provide her with curricular support in terms of lesson planning, Allison felt that she was able to dedicate more time to her students because she did not have to focus on the routine of selecting lessons for the day. Rather, she was able to adjust the lessons given to her to address the needs of the “different types of learners” in her classroom and focus on instruction.

As it turned out, one of Allison’s teammates was also her assigned mentor for the year, strengthening their team bond even further. Allison described their relationship as incredibly beneficial as she detailed her experience as a mentee. Allison shared that her mentor often observed her and provided feedback or assistance when necessary. Allison also had the opportunity to observe her mentor so she could learn from an exemplar. Allison mentioned that these observations had to be approved by administrators but she did not face an issue with this process throughout the school year; this only strengthened Allison’s belief that her administrators were present and responsive to teachers’ needs. In addition to observing each other as part of their mentor and mentee partnership, Allison stated that her mentor also checked on her daily by inquiring how her day was progressing. Allison also noted that the mathematics specialist would step into her classroom to provide coverage so Allison could observe her mentor because Allison did not want her students to lose mathematics instruction during the day. She said that the “math

specialist was open to coming in” and instructing the class so she could go and observe her mentor.

When I shifted my questions to discuss Allison’s students, she grew obviously proud and passionate to discuss their progress in the 2018-2019 school year. Allison shared that her students were largely successful on the state’s standardized assessment and that overall, her class scored 85%. She also included that she had one student score a perfect score on the assessment. She asserted that she was “really excited” because as a first-year teacher, she was delighted to have been successful in guiding her students to such an accomplishment. Allison expressed that she had set a goal for her students and she worked hard to ensure their success:

In the beginning, they were... [laughs], I had my work cut out for me. You know, but just realizing that, and knowing that I had a goal that I really wanted my students to be successful. I didn’t eat lunch some days. My planning periods, I kept my low kids in here with me, you know. I talked to parents and told them what they needed to do at home.

When I commended Allison for the level of dedication she showed for her students, she emphatically agreed: “I did the work. I did a lot of work!” In further describing her students, Allison revealed that the majority of her students were Hispanic and some were English language learners.

I next inquired about Allison’s level of satisfaction with her salary in 2018-2019. She responded with a chuckle and stated that I had asked her “a hard question.” She then shared that she is not satisfied with her level of pay:

This is really a personal opinion, I think that teachers are underpaid, very much so, because we work a lot. We work a lot; I just told you that I don’t eat some days, you

know. I spend my money on buying different manipulatives for my students, you know, just different rewards and treats because they are driven by prizes. And I wanted great results, so, you know, [sighs] I just think that teachers in general are overworked and underpaid so I'm not really satisfied with the salary. I think that we should be paid more because of the all of the work that we do and I don't think that people really understand. Allison also shared that, although her district is "one of the lowest paying districts" in the area, aspects such as the flexibility and laid-back feel of the district keep her there.

We then moved on to discussing the overall culture and climate at Star Elementary. Allison answered that she feels all teachers on the campus "want to strive for excellence." She asserted that she could only speak to her experiences and she did not find herself in negative conversations throughout the year so she only had positive experiences to share. She made it a point to inform me that she came to work each day to teach her students and focus on their growth. She shared that "if you're not coming in here to take care of some business, then I don't have time," making her priorities extremely clear. She stated that her focus is making students better and improving students' situations. She also conveyed that she feels she contributes to the campus's positive climate. By making the decision to not engage or set aside time for negative interactions, Allison felt she kept herself focused on the task at hand: growing her students.

Next, I focused on Allison's professional relationship with her mathematics curriculum specialist. With a smile on her face, Allison expressed that the mathematics specialist was "absolutely amazing." She described the mathematics specialist as someone who was able to quickly and knowledgeably answer any mathematics question Allison asked. She was also able to offer insight to Allison about the level of rigor that should be seen in the classroom as well as

model lessons so Allison could see how a certain objective should be taught. I probed further and asked Allison if she felt that a curriculum specialist makes a difference to a new teacher. Allison responded assertively:

I think so because it's another level of support. It helps you to stay on track when you miss something, you know how if you type up a letter, you want somebody to overlook it to make sure that there's something that you don't miss? She was definitely a big, big support for the whole math and science team.

Allison stressed that the mathematics specialist “[knew] her stuff” and that, in Allison’s opinion, the mathematics specialist was a “perfect angel.” She revealed that the mathematics teachers on the campus were “all devastated” that the specialist was not returning. Allison described the direct support she received from the mathematics specialist at monthly planning meetings and PLCs.

After reviewing the three different descriptions for effective instructional coaching models, Allison likened the mathematics specialist to Duessen’s Teacher-Oriented coaching in a group and Aguilar’s Inquiry Based and Cognitive Coaching model. As the specialist worked with teachers in a group setting, she became their accountability partner as she supported teachers in delivering lessons and monitoring student growth. Allison described the mathematics specialist as a facilitator of a “whole conversation in [a] group” when analyzing student work. Based on these provided examples, Allison adamantly claimed the mathematics specialist was “very effective, super effective, 100% effective.”

Allison concluded the interview by reiterating that she had “an amazing first year of teaching,” an experience she felt grateful for as it seemed to not be the norm. She stated that

finances are the only reason she could foresee taking her from Star Elementary if she were to expand her family. When asked if having direct support from a curriculum specialist affected her decision to remain at her school, she confirmed that “it definitely did.” She revealed that she “cried like a baby” when the mathematics specialist informed the staff she would not be returning:

She was there to support us, the whole team, not just one person. Probably me because I needed the most support but, yeah, she definitely played a big role in me returning. ... I would definitely say it’s important to have [a curriculum specialist] because you need support, guidance... you need an accountability partner, you need someone in your corner. You need someone to tell you if you’re messing up or if you’re doing a good job.

You need someone and I think that our mathematics specialist was that. She was just that. Allison’s passion for working with the mathematics specialist was clear during her interview as was the impact of the mathematics specialist on Allison’s first year of teaching.

Upon completion of Allison’s interview, I administered a follow-up survey online before the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, Allison’s second year teaching. Allison’s feelings regarding her professional relationship with the campus’s mathematics specialist were nonexistent as the campus had yet to fill that position. Allison shared that the previous mathematics specialist she had worked with “provided an extensive amount of support, information, strategies and constructive criticism.” Allison expressed concern that her teaching capacity will be slightly impacted due to the lack of a mathematics specialist currently employed on the campus. She believed that she would “have to work much harder” than she was already was to “stay on top of things without the additional support of a curriculum specialist.” When

asked if Allison foresaw her professional relationship with the curriculum specialist impacting her decision to remain at her campus at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, she responded that she does anticipate her relationship with the new, yet to be hired, mathematics specialist to affect her decision to remain at Star Elementary.

Allison and I met for a second interview over the phone on a Thursday afternoon after her students had left for dismissal about two months after the initial interview took place. I began the interview by asking Allison to describe how her 2019-2020 school year had progressed thus far. Allison shared her year was “going very well” and her new group of students were “interesting and fun.” I then reminded Allison her the factors that she credited as motivation to return to Star Elementary after her first year of teaching, such as her group of students, her supportive teammates, and the mathematics curriculum specialist. She stated that her feelings had remained the same regarding these factors. Allison shared that the new mathematics curriculum specialist had been “amazing” so far. She stated that while meeting “someone new that you’ll be working so closely with” can be challenging at times, the new specialist had “proven to be awesome.” She also added that the administrative team on campus continued to be “very supportive.”

Allison and I then shifted to discussing the campus climate and culture. Allison shared that she had experienced a “little bit” of a shift in the climate of the campus “in a more positive” direction. She noted that the campus had been staffed with “a lot of new people” that were “on board with the same goals” and were aiming to do what was “best for children.” Allison shared that the campus felt “more like a family.” I then asked Allison to describe the professional relationship she had with the mathematics curriculum specialist in the 2019-2020 school year, understanding that with a new specialist arriving, the relationship would look different than it

had the previous year. Allison stated that due to the specialist being recently hired, they had yet to establish their routines and procedures; however, the mathematics specialist was present for weekly planning meetings and had already provided station materials for teachers to use in the classroom. Allison expressed that although the mathematics specialist had not been a member of Star Elementary for long, she made an effort to be present and supportive. Further discussing the shift in her working relationship with the mathematics specialist, Allison shared that because her grade level team plans as a collaborative unit, she had yet to reach out to the specialist for assistance or clarification in her lesson planning. This vastly differed from Allison's lesson planning process the year before with the former mathematics curriculum specialist. However, Allison noted that the new specialist had created a summative assessment for her team; when the team offered constructive criticism regarding the rigor of the questions, Allison shared that the mathematics specialist "was open to receiving" their feedback.

I next asked Allison if she felt supported by the curriculum specialist in terms of understanding the curriculum. Allison shared that she did feel supported because the curriculum specialist offered to assist the teachers if they needed guidance. We then moved on to discuss how the mathematics specialist supported the teachers in their instructional practices:

She has provided resources for us. She gave us some electronic resources that we can, you know, use in the classroom. She has not come to model a lesson in my class per se, but she has gone around to other different teachers in the classroom. She hasn't come to mine so I'm not sure if she's giving feedback on what she observes but, um, I heard that was going around and observing certain teachers and also she created a... something like a checkpoint.

When referring to the teacher-oriented coaching model in a group setting that Allison had selected last year as a mirror for her former curriculum specialist's coaching style, Allison noted that the new mathematics curriculum specialist seemed to be following the same model as evidenced by group planning meetings. I then asked Allison if this instructional coaching model would be motivation enough for her to return next year. Allison stated that the coaching model might be one reason, but not the most important. "As a new teacher," Allison shared that she preferred group planning because it assisted her in gaining a deeper understanding of the content she was responsible for teaching.

I then described a scenario in which the mathematics curriculum specialist was evaluated and found to be ineffective. When I asked Allison how this impact her, she stated that it would not affect her:

... it wouldn't impact the way I feel because she's only one person and my team has proven to come together even stronger. We did have that period of time when we didn't have the math specialist so it's like we were doing it before the math specialist so the math specialist coming in is like the icing on the cake, you know? ... And it was tough in the beginning just because we had to do every single thing ... so I can answer that question by saying that I wouldn't feel any way about it because I have so many other strong minded, great people on my team who I know ... can get the job done.

Allison followed up by admitting that if she did not have such a strong team, she would "be in trouble" without an effective curriculum specialist. When I asked Allison if the mathematics curriculum specialist followed a coaching cycle, she responded that the specialist did not.

However, Allison did not feel that a lack of a coaching cycle rendered her less able to do her job

because she would not allow another individual to “hinder” her from finding success. However, she did concede that the lack of a coaching cycle or an effective instructional coach would “play a major, major role” in her retention due to the likeliness of “getting burnt out” because of the increased workload she would carry.

I concluded our interview by asking Allison which affected her more: the relationship she had with a curriculum specialist or his or her level of effectiveness. Allison quickly responded that the effectiveness of a curriculum specialist was much more critical to her role as a classroom teacher:

We should all have a common goal to do what is in the best interest of the students, so if you’re effective, then that means my students will be effective, you know? So, I don’t really care about a relationship. I would have to have a great, positive working relationship but their effectiveness is more important.

Allison cemented her opinion by stating that curriculum specialists are “very important” and “very necessary” for teachers to be successful with increasing student achievement.

Participant 4: Principal at Star Elementary

I interviewed Tara Adams, principal at Star Elementary, on a Tuesday afternoon at the end of the school day. After a large rainstorm that brought a harried group of parents to the front desk to pick up their children, I waited in line at to be escorted to Tara’s office. At a conference table in her office, the reading specialist and another teacher were present as I introduced myself to the group. As we began our interview, both the reading specialist and the teacher left to go home. After a few minutes of conversation to put ourselves at ease and erase the stress of the day, Tara and I began to discuss what brought her into education. She shared that her mother and

father were both in education. Her grandparents, however, did not have the opportunity to work their way through public education. Because of this lack of opportunity, one of Tara's grandfather's shared with her his wish that he could learn to write his name. Tara, although she was young at the time, taught him how to write his name, and she recalled this experience as what stoked her passion for education. Although she said that she pursued a different degree in college, she fell back into education which demonstrated to her that "it was a calling." She revealed her passion for teaching stems from the fact that she "enjoy[s] working with students] and "trying to just really do something that makes a difference and has a lasting impact."

I progressed to asking Tara about her opinion on the quality of professional development given by Southwest School District to its teachers. She informed me that each new teacher begins with the district's new teacher orientation and then receive an individualized learning plan. This learning plan, provided by the district, details "the courses that they need to take in order to become familiar with the curriculum" that the district provides, "the instructional strategies" the district believes in, and "the instructional approach" that is used within the district. Tara added that there are also content specialists on the campus who provide "in-house training" for teachers as well as "model lessons and things of that nature." She also noted that the specialists provide training within the PLCs that the campus holds.

Tara next spoke of the mentoring program offered by Southwest School District. In the mentoring program, each mentor and mentee are provided with a binder that contains agendas to follow and conversations to have at certain points throughout the year. To ensure the procedures are being followed so that both parties are benefitting from the experience, an administrator is assigned to conduct binder checks for each mentoring partnership. In addition, administrators

hold monthly meetings with the mentees to discuss their progress and how they feel the mentoring relationship is supporting them. The monthly meetings are a campus initiative to further support the district mentoring initiative.

I next asked Tara to describe the level of administrative support she felt she was able to provide in terms of how present she and her team were in 2018-2019 and how they were able to support the teachers on their campus. Tara shared honestly and with transparency; she responded that administrative support “was a concern” in 2018-2019, so she and her team were “making a consistent effort to be present and more visible for the teachers.” She explained that her leadership team is comprised of herself, an associate principal, two assistant principals and three counselors. She told me that she and her leadership team had communicated with teachers that in the 2019-2020 school year, they were going to be more present in classrooms, PLCs, and the hallways. Tara also shared details about a system the leadership team had created in order to be more supportive to teachers on the campus.

The system consists of a chart in Tara’s office with every teacher’s name in a column on the left along with additional columns, one for each member of the leadership team. As the leadership team walks through the school and steps into classrooms, they come back to the chart in Tara’s office and document the level of instruction they saw using a color-coded system. Red stipulates that there is a concern in the classroom so the leadership team needs “to provide some support,” yellow designates that the teacher was “doing okay” but there might be a small concern, and green means that the teacher “is on point.” Tara stated that, as a leadership team, they regroup at the end of each week to review the color-coded chart. In order to identify trends, they review the grade levels to see what color each teacher received so that they can create an

action plan moving forward in order to best support their teachers and grade levels as a unit. In addition, if the chart is full of colors, the leadership team easily sees that they have been in several classrooms throughout the week and are working towards realizing their goal of being a present administrative team.

We then moved on to discuss the campus's overall academic performance in 2018-2019. A difficult topic for Tara, she frankly stated that she was "not proud to share that" but, in an attempt to be a very transparent administrator, revealed that her campus received a D rating from the state. Shedding a positive light on that piece of data, she shared that the campus has "big gains" they must make. Having already identified target areas, Tara worked alongside a local education service center to present the state accountability to the teachers. In an effort to create a collective move toward student growth, Tara explained to the staff that "everyone has a piece" and all staff need to be made aware of what the areas of need are for the campus. Tara also included this information in the interviews she conducted before the 2019-2020 school year began in order to ensure that the teachers who joined her campus were passionate about growing students and prepared for a challenge:

You know, when you take a job, you're saying you want to work and you're going to give 100%. I needed 110%, 115% because we have some larger gains that we need to make versus what some other campuses might have to make. So, they knew that up front and the group of teachers that came on board are very energetic, very passionate, saying that they were willing to take on that challenge and I believe them.

Tara noted that she believes she hired a group of teachers “that can really turn it around.” She expressed that she “had to get rid of some teachers” that were “set in their ways, not willing to change.”

Tara referenced a book study she had conducted on the campus, “Transforming School Culture,” and how the book spoke of various teacher belief systems such as believers, tweeners, fundamentalists, and survivors. She disclosed that in 2018-2019, she felt many of her teachers were fundamentalists or survivors; she made it clear this was not the mindset she needed her campus to have. Tara noted her desire to employ “younger teachers” who are prepared to “really dig in” to the work of educating young children and that also have the mindset that “all kids can learn.” Tara disclosed that some veteran teachers in 2018-2019 shifted to the mindset of marking a student as a “behavior problem” and then pushing that student “to the side” so as to “not worry about them” because that is a student the teacher “could afford to lose.” Tara passionately negated that belief by stating that they “can’t afford to lose any children.”

When I asked Tara to summarize the campus’s climate in just a few words, Tara conveyed that the teachers “were almost functioning as if they were burned out” from the beginning of the year. While Tara realized that Star Elementary teachers were serving a “population of students that require a lot,” she felt that she could not identify one sole factor that led to the teachers’ decline in morale. She felt there were many “contributing factors” that, when pooled together, “equaled to students not succeeding.” She shared that, as a first-year principal, there were many things she should have done differently. She referenced Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and mentioned that she made an effort to give teachers treats such as jean passes or praise notes. However, like addressing a student’s Hierarchy of Needs, she recognized that each teacher

is an “individual person” and she needed to be “specific to what the needs are” for that individual teacher. She shared that in 2018-2019, there was an abundance of “lumping everybody into one category” and that “may not have been what each individual person needed.” Moving forward, she intended to be “more intentional” when interacting with the teachers on her campus.

I then asked Tara to describe her campus’s demographics. She shared that Star Elementary is a very diverse campus with students representing several countries around the world. She mentioned that some teachers struggled building relationships with their students due to a lack of understanding various cultures. Tara then referred to a common graphic seen in educational trainings that portrays the belief that equal and equitable are not synonymous. She spoke of the effort she made to have teachers understand that not all students can be pooled into “one category” and “all kids are not going to be taught the same.” In addition, “all kids are not going to behave the same way” and she, as an administrator, pushed teachers to understand that they needed to “design [their] instruction to meet those needs [of their students].”

I probed further about the campus’s academics to identify whether there was a gap between the students’ performance in mathematics and reading. Tara shared that her students “perform[ed] better on math,” which she found to be “ironic” due to the fact that teachers generally put reading as a priority before mathematics. Due to the discrepancy between the students’ performance in mathematics and reading, Tara stated that the district implemented an initiative to focus on literacy. However, historical data for the campus shows that the students at Star Elementary “typically perform better on the math.” Tara attributed this to the “particular math specialist” employed at the campus in 2018-2019.

Tara described the curriculum specialists' roles as being very hands-on through the work of facilitating PLCs, attending planning meetings, helping teachers analyze data, modeling lessons, presenting instructional strategies and best practices, and working with teachers to maintain their position on the pacing guide. Tara disclosed that she is kept abreast of the specialists' work on the campus through weekly curriculum, instruction and assessment (CIA) meetings. Tara continued that when collecting data through their leadership team walkthroughs and observations, the leadership team conveyed the information to the curriculum specialists who then moved forward in providing support to the teachers.

I then provided Tara with three proven effective methods of instructional coaching to identify which coaching model the curriculum specialists aligned to. Tara likened the specialists to Knight's Three Step Process with "a little bit of" Duessen's Group-Oriented coaching. Tara explained that because the leadership team identified areas of need or facilitated a discussion so the teachers could identify the areas of need themselves, the teachers then learned from the specialists as they offered guidance and support. When I asked Tara if she would consider both of the curriculum specialists effective, she confirmed that the mathematics curriculum specialist was effective. However, she felt she could not say the same for the reading specialist. She attributed this in part to the transition experienced on the campus in the reading specialist position. Tara disclosed that they began the 2018-2019 school year with a reading specialist who was released from the position in September. Another individual stepped into the role in the interim, but as she was "servicing multiple campuses," Star Elementary was not receiving the level of support the teachers needed. Tara then shared that the current reading specialist stepped into the role in January from her previous role as a classroom teacher at Star Elementary. Due to

this midyear transition, Tara noted that the reading specialist “had somewhat of a learning curve.” She was an “excellent teacher, strong with instructional strategies,” but struggled in her new position as a reading specialist working in a coaching capacity.

I concluded the interview by asking Tara if she believed that she was able to retain first- and second-year teachers at the end of 2018-2019 in part because of the relationships they had with the curriculum specialists. Tara stated that she felt “the amount of support that new teachers receive” plays a large role “in whether they come back or not”:

Again, with my book study, we’re talking about the tweeners because that’s what they’re called, the first- and second- year teachers...because research shows that in those first three years is when they decide if they’re going to stay in the profession or not.

Tara revealed that she shared with the staff, “especially with the mentors,” that those were the teachers they needed to be “positive role models” for. Tara completed the interview by stating that she believed if teachers felt supported and were able to see the benefits of their hard work and the difference they made in their students’ lives, “it would lead them to want to stay.”

Participant 5: Curriculum Specialist at Star Elementary

To conclude the series of conducted interviews, I interviewed Carla Gaines, reading curriculum specialist at Star Elementary. Due to a hectic schedule, Carla opted to participate in the interview over the phone on a Friday afternoon at the end of a work week. A veteran teacher hailing from a background that taught her the importance of pursuing an education, Carla shared her experiences as the campus’s reading specialist. Carla began the interview by sharing her background information and how education impacted her as a young adult. Sharing that she lost her mother at the tender age of five, Carla explained that she was raised by her single father. Her

father dropped out of school in seventh grade and struggled with reading later in life. Carla fondly -recalled two teachers that “really went the extra mile to help” her throughout middle school. In fact, the relationship she built with these teachers led her to view them not only as educators, but as “mother figure[s]” as well.

Upon graduating high school, Carla began studying sociology in college and eventually found herself working at a law firm. Unfulfilled with working at a desk day after day, Carla made the transition to teaching after successfully completing an alternative certification program. Carla’s career began teaching in Richardson School District, a small rural district not far from Southwest School District, where she taught for five years. She then transitioned to Anderson School District, a suburban district slightly larger than Southwest School District, where she taught for three years. After those three years, she returned to Richardson School District and taught for three more years.

Finally moving to Southwest School District, Carla began the 2018-2019 school year as a fourth-grade language arts teacher at Star Elementary before the transition to the role of curriculum specialist in January. When I probed further into this transition, Carla shared:

It was difficult because I started midyear, so I had to leave my students behind, so that was the most challenging part for me. Do I stay in the classroom and finish my year with my students, or should I take this opportunity? Obviously, I chose to take the opportunity, so that was really hard and difficult for me.

I then asked Carla to describe the professional development she received when she first stepped into her new role as reading specialist. She confided that she did not receive professional development and found that she had to “learn on [her] own,” making her feel as if she “was just

thrown out there.” When asked to compare her midyear start date to the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, Carla stated that she had yet to receive specific job training and was continuing to “learn as [she goes].” Carla also noted that her campus team, known as the CIA team (curriculum, instruction and assessment), experienced turnover in many positions. As a result, she and a secondary specialist at another campus are the only returning members of their team for the 2019-2020 school year.

I then began to delve deeper into Carla’s experiences in the 2018-2019 school year. Carla shared that she felt extremely supported by her administrators and credited them for successfully completing her first experience as a curriculum specialist. She mentioned the weekly CIA meetings that were held at the campus and spoke to the support and clarity those meetings provided her in spite of lacking adequate professional development. Carla also specifically mentioned the administrators’ “open door policy” so that “any time [she] had questions or concerns, [she] could always go to the administrators for support.” She noted that the CIA members have continued to work as a cohesive team throughout the start of the 2019-2020 school year as well.

I then asked Carla to describe the general academic performance of the students at Star Elementary. From the vantage point of the campus’s curriculum specialist supporting multiple grade levels, I asked Carla to identify trends, if possible, that she noticed across the grade levels or speak to the needs that teachers shared with her that might have been common across the grade levels. Unfortunately, Carla referred only to her experience as a fourth-grade language arts teacher and shared information at the surface level regarding the academic performance of those students. She explained that the fourth-grade team had many new teachers in the 2018-2019

school year, and they lacked sufficient professional development. Due to the lack of training, the teachers experienced much confusion when attempting to understand the curriculum they were being asked to teach. As a result, student achievement suffered due to the lack of teacher clarity. I then questioned whether adjustments had been made by the leadership team moving into the 2019-2020 school year. Carla explained that they established new procedures for leading professional development on the campus, including conducting follow-up meetings a week after professional development sessions are held to ensure teachers fully grasp the training and understand how to implement the new practices in their classrooms. In addition, she uses this information as she observes teachers in their classrooms and gives them evidence-based feedback through the lens of their professional development. Carla also begins each PLC with “ten or fifteen minutes” in which she “model[s] some type of strategy” for teachers.

Next, I asked Carla about the culture and climate at Star Elementary in the 2018-2019 school year. She felt as if the teachers “struggled.” She attributed this in part to the campus hiring a new administrator:

You know, any time you have a new change in administration, that can also lead to a change in the campus culture. So, I think that that impacted the campus culture last year.

You know, teachers didn’t really adjust to that change very well.

Comparing the culture from 2018-2019 to the culture of the campus in the 2019-2020 school year, Carla noted that she feels as if Star Elementary is “a brand-new school.” With several new language arts teachers on multiple grade level teams, Carla shared that her plan for the new school year is to “continue to equip them with skills” necessary to succeed.

I then began to ask Carla questions regarding her professional working relationship with teachers and how they operated as a team throughout the 2018-2019 school year. Carla first stated that she makes an effort to “do little small things” for teachers on the campus. Carla mentioned, for example, that rather than having teachers scan their own answer documents upon completing an assessment in their classroom, Carla collects the answer documents from the teachers and scans them herself. She also mentioned that she, at times, goes into teachers’ classrooms to both model lessons and “give them a break.” She shared that she “can tell when a teacher is frustrated,” so if she happens upon their classroom and notes their level of frustration is elevated, Carla steps in to “give them, like, a ten-minute break” as she “take[s] over their class for them.” I noted that Carla’s response focused on recognizing teachers’ needs for assistance in areas other than instruction. She shared the motivation behind her actions:

I try to do little small things just to try to help, you know, make copies or just the little small things. I’ve been a teacher before and I know the struggle and how you become overwhelmed and there’s so much that you have to do in one day. So, I try to do little things to relieve their stress.

I then probed further in an attempt to identify the instructionally based actions she takes to support teachers, specifically through PLC or planning meetings. Carla informed me that part of her job responsibilities is to attend each PLC meeting; these meetings occur bi-weekly and last ninety minutes. While the team leader typically facilitates the meeting, Carla shared that she will facilitate a portion of the meeting in the case she needs to share information related to instruction. She added that teachers also use this time to “go over their lesson plans for the

following week” and “they discuss data.” Though she does not often facilitate this process, she acts as an “instructional guide” for the educators in the meeting.

I then provided Carla with a summary of three instructional coaching models proven to be effective. I verbally provided detailed descriptions of each model and asked her to compare herself to a model that she felt she closely aligned with. Carla determined that her actions as a curriculum specialist most closely align with Deussen’s Group-Oriented coaching model. This model details an instructional coach that meets with teachers in a group setting, plans for curriculum meetings, and provides professional development to teachers. I then asked, as she had compared herself to a proven effective model, if she would consider herself to have been an effective curriculum specialist in the 2018-2019 school year. After a moment of reflection, Carla confided that she felt unsure of her abilities in this area:

...I still feel as though I still have things and areas to improve on myself. Being that I am, like, new, I still consider myself new. I still have areas of improvement, but I feel like I’m doing an okay job. But again, there are still things that I need to work on. ... I’m the only specialist for Pre-K through sixth grade and so it’s just a lot of responsibility that I have to cover for all these different grade levels and I’m trying to just organize myself to meet every teacher’s needs. That’s the area I’m struggling with right now.

I next asked Carla her opinion regarding the importance of effectiveness. She shared that, from her perspective as a curriculum specialist, her effectiveness in her position is more impactful to teachers when compared to their personal relationship. She felt that “effectiveness is more important”; it is “great to build relationships and things like that, but at the end of the day, it’s a job.” Carla likened herself to a teacher and claimed that as a teacher, she would prefer a

specialist to be effective, meaning they are knowledgeable and able to provide strategies and best practices one would need in order to be an effective teacher.

I then asked Carla to view the question through the lens of a specialist. She shared that her level of effectiveness in terms of supporting teachers is far more important to her, personally, than the personal relationships she builds with the teachers. I concluded the interview by asking whether Carla believed that her direct support in the 2018-2019 school year encouraged new language arts teachers on the campus to return to their position. When focusing on her first year as a curriculum specialist, Carla seemed to avoid answering the question directly by stating that “there were a lot of things going on within the curriculum department itself” and those transitions affected the teachers. However, when speaking of the 2019-2020 school year, she responded positively, stating that her “level of support or effectiveness will have an impact” on the language arts teachers that she supports in her role.

As we completed the interview, Carla felt compelled to share one last insight with me regarding her experience in her first year as a curriculum specialist. Carla reflected on her feelings of unpreparedness during that time and stated:

I just feel as though even being a specialist, you know, you don’t know everything, so you still have to provide, in any district, provide your specialist with training in itself so they can be, you know, they best specialist they can be for the teachers. It’s very important to train your specialists so they can train others. That’s just my, you know, opinion about being a specialist so far in my experience.

Carla's vulnerability in disclosing such information was an appropriate reflection of her demeanor throughout the interview; she transparently and honestly answered questions with insightful responses.

Participant Interview Summary

These sections provided a detailed description of a series of semi-structured interviews centered around the experiences that five educators encountered in the 2018-2019 school year followed by their subsequent experiences in the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year. The first section described Ruth Barnes, a first-year teacher at Star Elementary who shared her positive outlook in spite of difficulties she encountered. She then spoke of the positive changes she encountered in her second year at Star Elementary, also her first full year of teaching. The second section reviewed the experiences of Nicole Collins, a second-year teacher at Star Elementary who shared her frustrations regarding certain campus practices but whose compassion motivates her to continue teaching. Ms. Collins then shared the changes she noted throughout the start to the following school year. The third section detailed the experiences of Allison Davis, a first-year teacher at Star Elementary who solely shared positive comments regarding her first year in the field of education. Ms. Davis' passion for both her campus and her students was evident throughout the interview. The fourth section spoke of Tara Adams, the first-year principal at Star Elementary. Ms. Adams was transparent in sharing both her successes and her areas of growth in the 2018-2019 school year. The final section shared the trials and tribulations faced by the reading curriculum specialist, Carla Gaines, as she transitioned to a new role upon leaving the classroom. In the next section, themes identified across the participants'

interviews will provide further insight into the educators' perceptions of the impact instructional coaches have on teachers early in their careers.

Identified Themes within the Data

Bhattacharya (2017) states that themes do not merely emerge from qualitative research. Rather, a researcher identifies themes of her own "analytical thinking" through working closely with the data. As the researcher continues to delve deeper into the collected data, patterns begin to form which, in turn, informs the manner in which the researcher identifies themes.

Bhattacharya further informs that these "patterns are organizational, characterize different segments of data, and help the researcher and reader develop an in-depth understanding that responds to the research questions and purpose (p. 151). In alignment with Tesch's eight-step coding process explained previously in Figure 2, Bhattacharya suggests "mapping" a process in which the researcher moves "in and out of several steps" (p. 155). Following the suggestions made by both experts in the field, I began reviewing the interview transcripts, stopping when I reached a segment of an interview that brought ideas to the surface. Upon writing my reflections, I would then re-read the transcripts in order to repeat the process.

Like Tesch's recommendation to review a list of all topics identified, Bhattacharya advises to then map out connections between the multiple sources of data in order to best identify patterns evident among the participants (2017). Following Bhattacharya's coding process, I created a color-coded list of topics that became evident as I continued to read the transcripts. This initial list then allowed me to compile a more refined bank of themes consisting of topics that were evident in multiple interviews. As I encountered topics that were isolated to only one

participant and not a shared perspective, I also noted those as a point of interest to investigate further.

Theme 1: Shared Ideas and Experiences

Passion for education. I first found it noteworthy that all participants shared a deep love for education and felt it came naturally to them. Two participants specifically mentioned a “passion” for learning and educating children. Three of the participants commented that someone in their family had been an educator and cited those family members as being an inspiration and a catalyst in their decision to become educators themselves. Ruth put education in perspective when she shared the following:

I just wanted to instill the love for education in other students as well because I know there’s a world full of teachers that, you know, just go for the paycheck.

All four participants echoed this sentiment by supporting the idea that their passion lies in providing a quality education for children so that all students can experience a love of learning.

Role of professional development. All participants were also aligned in their perception of the district’s and campus’s professional development provided to new teachers. Specifically for first-year teachers, Tara expressed that, in addition to new teacher orientation, teachers were provided with courses necessary to “become familiar with the curriculum” and “instructional approach” used in Southwest School District. Ruth and Allison both shared that, while the amount of training might have felt overwhelming, the professional development they received was “very, very helpful” and “covered many areas” in which a new teacher might require assistance. Nicole echoed this sentiment by sharing that the professional development she

attended over the summer was helpful and provided her with necessary tools she could easily implement in her classroom.

Dedication to their career. Each educator outlined the demands of the job and the outstanding effort and dedication she poured into ensuring the students' success. Nicole confided that on occasion, she would "stay up until two in the morning grading papers" while her husband encouraged her to lie down and save the remainder of her task for another time. Allison described her days as being so busy that at times, she elected to not eat lunch. She also shared that she at times kept students with her during her conference period in an effort to provide additional support. In addition to spending her personal money purchasing rewards and incentives for the students, Allison kept open lines of communication with parents. Like Allison, Nicole realized that students' home lives played a large role in students' success so she made an effort to establish positive relationships with the students so as to provide them a safe environment in her classroom. Like Nicole and Allison's outlook, Ruth also reflected upon arriving home in the evenings, asking herself, "What happened today that I can change tomorrow?" This reflection allowed her to arrive every morning with a fresh perspective; she greeted her students by saying "Nice to meet you! Are we going to have a good day?" which allowed them to begin their day with a clean slate as well. Tara confirmed this further by expressing that she need "100%...110%...150%" from her teachers who are willing to "take that challenge" and educate students who are categorized as being "high need." As a leader, Tara made efforts on the campus to adjust the master schedule in order to avoid teachers feeling the need to stay after their contract hours until seven- or eight-o'clock in the evening.

District and campus culture. Another common trend was the belief that Southwest School District and Star Elementary both possess a “family” feel. Ruth expressed that a benefit of working in a smaller district was that she had access to multiple district leaders and felt her voice could be heard. Being able to contact district leaders with ease offered a feeling of cohesiveness among the district and campus staff. All three classroom teachers shared that they felt the campus came together as a family and the campus teachers were supportive of one another. Nicole described that at times when a new initiative would be introduced or the teachers felt that they were inundated with tasks and responsibilities, they had a sense of being “in it together.”

The three classroom teachers indicated that the 2019-2020 school year began positively. Nicole noted the implementation of team bonding and relationship building activities woven into their professional development at the beginning of the year. She also appreciated that administrators were involved in these activities as well as opposed to solely certified and professional staff. Ruth and Allison both mentioned the hiring of several new staff members. Both individuals stated that the new teachers hired on the campus brought a positive atmosphere with them and enhanced the family feel of the campus. Ruth and Allison noted that the teachers of Star Elementary in the new school year were working toward the same ultimate goal of student achievement and growth.

Supportive colleagues. Throughout their interviews, Nicole and Allison both mentioned repeatedly that they had incredibly strong and supportive teammates. They both attributed their decision to return to Star Elementary in some part to the support of their grade level team. Allison disclosed that she felt a strong connection with her team, specifically her partner. She felt

that she was surrounded by people who “took care of [her].” Nicole shared a similar experience in which she described that she and her team frequently spend time together off-campus outside of the work day. She expressed that “they are literally [her] best friends” and provided her with a substantial support system. Neither Ruth nor Tara described their teams in one capacity or another.

Level of student achievement. When describing the student population at Star Elementary, three of the four participants expressed that the students they serviced require a high level of support. Nicole shared that her students had entered her class at the beginning of the year reading below grade level expectations. Ruth shared the same sentiment, describing her students as “low.” She did share that she was able to “elevate some of the students” but unfortunately was unable to see growth in all students. Tara described the diverse student population as historically struggling in their roles as readers and writers while performing better in their roles as mathematicians. Tara also shared that the campus had large gains to make as the year progressed. Allison conveyed that her students, while they performed well on the state’s standardized assessment, began as struggling mathematicians and were able to succeed because of the work and dedication put in by herself and the students.

Curriculum specialist. All participants spoke highly of at least one specialist that they worked directly with. Ruth disclosed that she felt she was able to share her opinions with the reading specialist due to their strong professional relationship. She also spoke of the reading specialist and praised her flexibility in terms of scheduling to meet teachers’ needs. Tara and Nicole shared similar perspectives, although in contrast to Ruth’s, regarding the reading specialist. Both felt that, while she put forth effort to learn her position as a new reading

specialist, she was ineffective due in part to a lack of experience. However, Tara and Nicole also shared that the mathematics specialist was incredibly effective in her role. Tara even went as far as to attribute the campus's success in mathematics to the efforts put forth by the mathematics specialist. Nicole described the mathematics specialist as being present and knowledgeable as she supported teachers. Allison further confirmed this by sharing that the mathematics specialist impacted her in many ways and provided guidance through modeling lessons. All participants stated that the specialists were present for PLCs, planning meetings and additional times in order to support teachers.

All interviewees agreed that working directly with an effective curriculum specialist affected their decision to remain at Star Elementary. Tara stated that any support a new teacher receives plays an important part in their decision to continue at their current campus; she also noted that she felt her new teachers on campus were impacted by their professional relationships with the curriculum specialists. Ruth shared that she felt working with a strong specialist eased many stressors and that would impact her decision to continue her journey at Star Elementary. She also noted that the support she received was hands-on and impactful. Nicole mentioned multiple times that the mathematics specialist offered her the resources necessary to positively impact her students. Nicole also revealed that she was anticipating returning to Star Elementary in the 2019-2020 school year to continue working alongside the mathematics specialist and was devastated to find she would not be returning. Nicole definitively stated that a "good specialist" can have a substantial impact on both teachers and students; she feared that her teaching capacity would be negatively impacted by the lack of a mathematics specialist and would likely impact her decision to return to Star Elementary. Allison echoed Nicole's feelings regarding the

mathematics specialist's departure from the campus. Allison confirmed that a curriculum specialist is an important role that can provide guidance and act as an accountability partner for teachers. Due to the lack of a mathematics specialist, Allison felt she would have to put in additional effort on top of the extraordinary dedication she already shows in order to be successful without the support of a mathematics specialist.

Instructional coaching model. The three classroom teachers, Ruth, Nicole and Allison, agreed that the instructional coaching model utilized by the campus's curriculum specialists played an integral model in their decision to remain at the campus. The teachers credited this consistency and stability an instructional coaching model provides with positively impacting their teaching capacity. Nicole and Allison specifically noted the impact the former mathematics curriculum specialist had on their ability to grow in their profession through the use of an instructional coaching model. Carla agreed that the instructional coaching model was critical to teacher success; however, she also shared that her feeling of inexperience minimized her effectiveness in fully implementing an instructional coaching model.

Ruth mentioned that the coaching model utilized by the reading specialist allows her time to reflect on her current practices and adjust her instruction as needed under the guidance of the curriculum specialist. Nicole claimed that the effective use of an instructional coaching model by the campus's reading specialist would maximize her effectiveness as a teacher, which, in turn, would increase her students' achievement and growth. Allison's thoughts regarding the instructional coaching model implemented by the new mathematics curriculum specialist were a bit more convoluted. She expressed that the new mathematics specialist used the teacher-oriented coaching model in a group setting; however, Allison also expressed that she and her team had

grown accustomed to not meeting with a curriculum specialist during the period of time the campus was interviewing potential candidates. Due to this transition period, Allison stated that whereas her former mathematics curriculum specialist's presence and instructional coaching model was necessary for her success, she felt she could attain success without the presence of the new mathematics specialist.

Importance of effectiveness. Nicole, Allison and Carla were all in agreement when they concluded that the effectiveness of an instructional coach is more important to classroom teachers than the personal relationship they might form. Nicole explicitly stated that, as a classroom teacher looking to maximize student achievement and growth throughout the school year, she prefers an effective and knowledgeable curriculum specialist. She stated that being friends with a curriculum specialist will not positively impact student learning; however, working alongside a curriculum specialist who is able to maximize Nicole's efforts as a teacher will increase her students' achievement levels. Allison agreed with this sentiment as she explained that she did not require personal relationships with the curriculum specialists on campus. More important to Allison was the effect on her students. She claimed that working closely with an effective curriculum specialist increases her own knowledge and skills as a teacher, which increases the effectiveness of her students, leading her closer to her goal of raising the potential of her students.

Carla also stated that her effectiveness in the role of a curriculum specialist was more important to her than the personal relationship she had with campus teachers. Though she recognized how critical it is to build positive relationships with colleagues, she also noted that teachers need an effective curriculum specialist to provide them with necessary knowledge and

teaching practices so that they may build capacity within themselves. Ruth's response varied slightly from Nicole's and Allison's as she stated that both the effectiveness of a curriculum specialist and the personal relationship they fostered were of equal importance. She explained that a strong personal relationship maximizes the impact a curriculum specialist can have on a teacher once a level of trust and camaraderie have been established. Though Ruth placed more importance on the personal relationship aspect than the other educators, they all determined that effectiveness is highly essential to the success and retention of classroom teachers.

Theme 2: Varying Experiences and Differing Beliefs

Perceived level of administrative support. One set of experiences the educators described that varied between participants was the perceived level of administrative support at Star Elementary. Whereas Allison felt that administrators were incredibly supportive and cited one specific incident in which she received a timely response in a moment of need, Nicole, Ruth and Tara shared different experiences in their interviews. Both Tara and Nicole expressed a sense of transition and that the administrative team spent a large portion of their time dedicated to making sense of a newly combined campus as well as sifting through first-year principal experiences. Nicole mentioned that she felt the administrators spent more time focused on "fixing" concerns around the school as opposed to supporting teachers. Ruth disclosed that she felt as if the presence could have been stronger but assumed she was left to do her job in isolation because the administrative team was confident in the university from which she graduated. Tara specifically mentioned that she, as the campus leader, had taken the initiative to be more present moving forward and already created a system to ensure visibility across the campus.

District mentoring program. When describing their experiences in the district's mentoring program, Ruth, Nicole and Allison shared slightly differing experiences. Tara, though she explained the procedures of the district's mentoring program, did not speak of her belief in the effectiveness of the program. Allison had the good fortune to be assigned as mentor one of her teammates with whom she already had a strong bond, strengthening the level of support she felt she received from her team. She shared that she and her mentor worked together frequently. Nicole also relied heavily on her mentor and even claimed that "she [was] one of the reasons why [Nicole] survived the school year."

Ruth had a less beneficial experience in the 2018-2019 school year. Ruth felt that because assigned mentors were also campus teachers, she felt her mentor had "her own classroom and stuff that's going on too" so there was not sufficient time to delve deep into Ruth's needs. Ruth said that the meetings were informal and covered basic questions. However, when Ruth began the 2019-2020 school year, she became an official member of the mentor and mentee program. She spoke highly of the program and was especially appreciative of the district and campus leaders present during the monthly meetings.

Campus climate. The climate of the campus was described in a variety of ways dependent on the interviewee. Allison said that she had not encountered any negativity on the campus. She felt the culture and climate were positive and all educators strove for excellence, both for themselves and their students. However, she attributed this to the fact that she did not allow herself to engage in interactions that did not center on student growth or instruction. Nicole described the culture as experiencing periodic dips in morale when teachers would band together so that they knew they were not "the only person being targeted." Ruth echoed Nicole's thoughts

as she conveyed that the climate on the campus was stressful because it appeared that some teachers had “given up” and allowed negativity to flow freely. Tara attributed some of the negativity and “burned out” atmosphere on the campus to teachers who had grown “set in their ways, not willing to change.” Upon self-reflecting, Tara took partial ownership in this by recognizing that she had addressed the staff’s needs a whole rather than recognizing staff members as individuals with varying needs.

Theme 3: Coaching Model and Student Placement

Instructional coaching model. Whereas all the participants stated that they felt a professional relationship with an effective curriculum specialist played a pivotal role in teacher retention, their choice of instructional coaching models that aligned to their campus’s curriculum specialists differed from educator to educator. Allison described the mathematics specialist as a mix between Duessen’s “Teacher-Oriented Coaching (Group)” and Aguilar’s “Inquiry Based and Cognitive Coaching Model.” Nicole most likened the mathematics specialist to Duessen’s “Teacher-Oriented Coaching (Group).” Ruth compared the reading specialist to Aguilar’s “Inquiry-Based and Cognitive Coaching Model.” Carla felt that she most closely followed Duessen’s “Teacher-Oriented Coaching (Group).” Interestingly, Tara aligned the curriculum specialists’ coaching model to Knight’s “Three Step Process.” These differences bring about the question of expectations: Do the teachers have the same expectations of the curriculum specialists as the administrators do?

Treatment of beginning teachers. A final interesting topic that appeared in Nicole’s interview is the idea that new teachers are assigned classes rife with behavior concerns and low academic abilities. While the research does suggest this occurs, the only mention of receiving

what could be considered an undesirable class appeared in Nicole's interview and not Ruth's or Allison's. Nicole stated that teachers told her after she began the school year that they were instructed to "get rid of" students of their choosing. In order to pacify the teachers who were upset regarding large class sizes, administrators allowed the original teachers to build a roster for Nicole without final approval. Her claim that she received challenging class rosters for two consecutive years because she was a beginning teacher begs for further inquiry.

Results in the Context of the Theoretical Framework

Through the lens of the constructivist learning theory, this study was shaped based on my beliefs, assumptions, and values as the researcher in addition to those of the participants (Bhattacharya, 2017). This study examined in detail the experiences of three beginning teachers, a curriculum specialist, and one campus administrator as I attempted to analyze how the participants formed meanings and actions. The interviews, follow-up questionnaire, and analysis of the campus and district data allowed me, as the researcher, to "get as close to the experience as possible" (p. 105). Following the process of "data forming," I interacted with each participant throughout the data collection and analysis process (p. 105). As suggested by Charmaz (2006), upon analyzing each individual interview, I then integrated the five participants' responses so as to conceptualize apparent themes that were grounded in data (as cited in Bhattacharya, 2017).

The constructivist perspective typically used in qualitative research originated from the works of Mannheim, Berger, Luekmann, Lincoln and Guba (Creswell, 2014). This perspective operates under the belief that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 37). As individuals gather experiences, they refine the subjective meanings of those experiences. The meanings they assign to their life experience can grow to be deeply complex

and varied from individual to individual. As the researcher of this study, I followed the constructivist learning theory as I provided “open-ended questioning” and focused attentively on the nuances of the participants’ responses (p. 37). The constructivist learning theory also encourages researchers to delve into the interactions among individuals by further analyzing the “specific contexts in which people live and work” in order to gain a profound understanding of the settings and beliefs of the participants (p. 37). I accomplished this by specifically inquiring about the professional interactions between the teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches.

Using the guidance of the constructivist learning theory, I assembled a detailed analysis of the experiences shared by three beginning teachers and an administrator in relation to their professional experiences with their campus’s curriculum specialists, one of whom also participated in the research study. By using broad questioning strategies and interacting with the participants, I attempted to create meaning in the context of their beliefs regarding the importance of instructional coaching. Shaped by the values, beliefs, and assumptions by all parties involved, I conducted an in-depth analysis of the potential impact instructional coaching can have on teachers early in their careers, specifically on their retention.

Summary

This section consisted of themes identified throughout the eight interviews conducted with three teachers, one curriculum specialist, and the principal at Star Elementary. Specifically, this section examined common themes identified across the interviews, themes in which beliefs and perceptions varied across the interviews, and topics that arose in the interviews that could potentially interest the reader. The final chapter will discuss how the results of this

study build upon the review of existing literature provided in Chapter II and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

High teacher attrition rates continue to affect our nation's public school system. While research has shown that there are a multitude of factors contributing to low teacher retention rates, there are a number of beginning teachers choosing to stay in the teaching profession regardless. If a possible identified solution can assist in curbing the volume of teachers seeking alternative professions, it should be explored at a deeper level to possibly replicate in other locations. As teachers begin their professional careers, it is unfortunately common to find that 25% - 30% of teachers resign after their first year of teaching; equally dismal, only 50% of teachers remain in the profession after completing five years of teaching (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Norton, 1999; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). The implications of this turnover are vast and drastic. The cost to both districts and states is astonishing, reaching nearly \$5 billion nationwide (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). Aside from the expenditures public education incurs in the wake of high teacher turnover, the most notable and alarming implication is a decrease in student achievement. Student growth and success is at the core of what educators strive to achieve. The idea that student learning suffers due to high teacher turnover is intolerable yet, unfortunately, a reality (Troutt, 2014).

While the existing research cites multiple reasons for teacher turnover, among the most common are a lack of administrative support, professional development, induction programs, mentoring programs, and a positive working environment (Boyd et al., 2011; Coggins & Peske, 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). In addition, the research also includes low student performance and low teacher salary as common factors of teacher turnover (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Stevens, 2009). In an

attempt to potentially remedy the situation in which public education has found itself, districts nationwide have implemented a series of interventions to minimize the number of teachers exiting the profession. To attract high quality educators, school districts are using nontraditional recruitment and selection strategies (Rebore, 2015). Once new teachers are employed within the district, district leaders are strategically implementing procedures to retain their newly hired staff. For example, districts are now placing a necessary emphasis on growing their own staff to become administrators with quality leadership characteristics (Boyd et al., 2011). In addition, districts are providing new teachers with supports such as induction programs and purposeful professional development (Fulton, Yoon & Lee, 2005; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). School districts are also implementing professional learning communities, PLCs, to increase teacher capacity through a network of colleagues (Thornton, 2010). To improve teachers' quality of life, districts are also taking steps towards offering incentivized pay (Springer, Swain, & Rodriguez, 2016). Lastly, instructional coaching is an additional intervention districts have established in order to provide instructional support to teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

This final chapter will review the factors that led to the retention of three teachers early in their careers in a district characterized by high teacher turnover. Furthermore, implications for campus and district leaders will be shared as well as recommendations for future researchers. In conclusion, thoughts are included for educational leaders to provide support to beginning teachers and instructional coaches.

Discussion of Key Findings

Several factors for the teachers' decision to remain at their campus arose from the collected data throughout the coding and analysis process. Notably, three separate factors held

the most importance as the educators shared their experiences. The emergent themes can be classified as (a) the importance of a supportive team of colleagues, (b) the effectiveness of an instructional coach, and (c) the identified effective instructional coaching model the educators selected to describe their curriculum specialists. The following sections describe each of these key findings in detail.

Key Finding 1: Supportive Team of Colleagues

One of the most important aspects of a beginning teacher's experience in their first years of teaching is support from both peers and administrators (Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011). This support comes in the form of grade level team members, teachers of differing grade levels within the same campus, mentor teachers, and various campus leaders as well as district leaders. The participants each described the importance of various accessible support systems within the district as a whole. Figure 3 provides a model of the supportive colleagues named by the participants who affected their decision to remain at their campus.

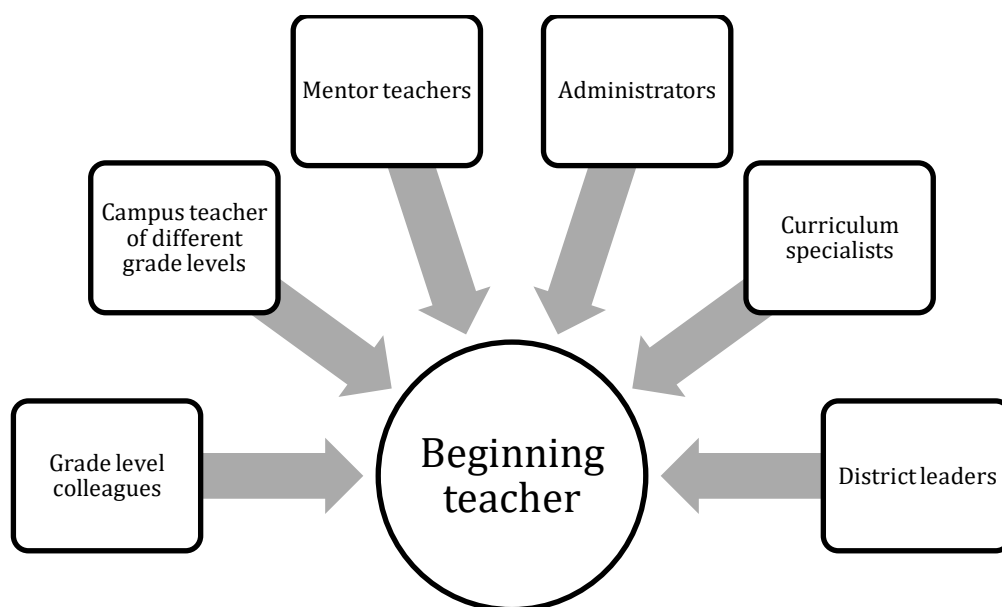


Figure 3: Support systems as provided by colleagues for beginning teachers.

Two of the classroom teachers who participated in this study named supportive colleagues on their grade level team as one of the most important factors in their retention. The educators described their teammates as individuals that grew to become great friends and confidantes. Naming not only partner teachers of a different content area but also grade level team members of the same content area, it became obvious that cohesive grade level teams played an important role in teacher retention. Participants shared that they felt taken care of by their teams and felt this had a powerful effect on their overall experience in their first years of teaching. Teachers described a united front presented by the grade level teams as they strove to educate and grow their students.

Support from grade level colleagues is not the only support system that beginning teachers appreciate. All of the classroom teacher participants included other campus leaders as crucial members of their support system. The participants credited colleagues such as their assigned mentor teachers, curriculum specialist, and administrators as key stakeholders who supported them in their journey in their first or second year of teaching. One participant went as far as to claim that her mentor was one of the primary reasons she managed to complete a successful first year of teaching. Research by Strong and Baron supports the importance of mentors by identifying connections between a mentored teacher and the longevity of said teacher's career (2004). On the other hand, one classroom teacher shared that she felt she would have been more successful had she been awarded a mentor who was able to dedicate time to her professional growth and success. This further speaks to the point that supportive colleagues, specifically mentors, are essential in contributing to a teacher's positive teaching experience.

Teachers also frequently mentioned the support provided by the curriculum specialists as the specialists acted as trusted experts and guided these teachers throughout their first or second year of teaching (Denmark, 2013). Educators shared that the curriculum specialists' consistent support in varying forms such as modeling lessons, analyzing assessment data, and providing resources was instrumental in their success. In addition, an apparent open-door policy demonstrated by the campus administrators provided support to three of the participants. Participants shared their desire to interact with administrators regularly and have frequent access to their feedback and guidance. Tara, the campus principal, acknowledged this request by implementing a new system to increase the visibility of the leadership team; this action will likely be well received by teachers based on their requests and feedback to the administrative team. This protocol implemented by the leadership team aligns to Kaufman and Al-Bataineh's research that first- and second-year teachers require "regular and frequent feedback from administration" (2011, p. 253).

The participants described the elementary campus staff as a family that banded together during times of stress or dips in morale. The teachers commented that when it seemed the campus was going through a difficult transition, teachers would join as a collective group that was attempting to work through the same challenges. Colleagues were available to support teachers in their requests, regardless of differing grade level or content area. Although all five participants expressed that there were times of high stress on the campus throughout the 2018-2019 school year, the teachers presented an air of solidarity with each other, even if their beliefs and expectations did not align with the administrative team's. Bobeck (2002) established that

forging strong, nurturing relationships among both colleagues and administrators plays a critical role in increasing teacher retention (as cited in Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011).

Kaufman and Al-Bataineh's work (2011) describes the importance of implementing practices to build a sense of community so that teachers feel as if they are an integral part of their working community. This concept is applicable to both a campus and a district. The participants extended the family feel of their campus to the district as a whole. They extended their circle of colleagues by including that the smaller size of the district awarded the elementary staff the opportunity to access district level leaders as well as teachers employed by different campuses within the district. While one participant named the superintendent's wife as an essential role model for language arts instruction, other educators mentioned the fact that should they show a need and request support, district level staff were available and prepared to visit the elementary campus to provide instructional support.

The information in this section detailed the multiple support systems cited by the participants as critical factors in their decision to remain at Star Elementary after completing their first or second year of teaching. The accessibility to a multitude of experts and available guidance enabled these educators to find success. Therefore, the teachers were motivated to continue their journey as educators, secure in the fact that they would continue to receive such targeted supports.

Key Finding 2: Effectiveness of an Instructional Coach

Instructional coaching has long been considered an intervention to support the education children receive in public school. Through the act of empowering teachers, instructional coaches provide targeted support that appears in a variety of approaches (Denmark, 2013). Participants in

the research study attributed many of their successes to the curriculum specialists that they worked closely with throughout the school year.

Former mathematics curriculum specialist. In describing their experiences in the 2018-2019 school year, the mathematics teachers characterized their curriculum specialist as a campus leader who was consistently present, knowledgeable, and willing to meet their needs regardless of the time or task. PLCs acted as the vehicle for actions such as analyzing assessment data and planning quality lessons; these actions, spearheaded by the mathematics curriculum specialist, helped to move a campus forward and increase student understanding. The mathematics curriculum specialist had the professional capacity to provide immediate support when teachers requested instructional resources or clarification on a specific curriculum standard. By providing the mathematics teachers on the campus with job-embedded professional development throughout the school year, the mathematics curriculum specialist successfully addressed the needs of the campus (Deussen et al., 2007).

Allison noted that a curriculum specialist is a necessary advocate for beginning teachers because specialists offer not only curricular support but act as an accountability partner as well. The mathematics curriculum specialist observed the classroom teachers' progress both inside and outside of the classroom and was able to provide feedback to the teachers, offering opportunities for professional growth (Dole, 2004). Going outside of the traditional instructional coach responsibilities, the mathematics curriculum specialist was also known to provide classroom coverage so mathematics teachers could observe their colleagues and learn from their peers. Allison attributed a portion of her professional learning and success to this practice provided by the curriculum specialist. In addition to assisting teachers in observing their colleagues, the

curriculum specialist also designated time to enter a teacher's classroom to model a lesson a teacher requested, providing clarification and a deeper understanding for classroom teachers who had the opportunity to observe the curriculum specialist in such a manner. Figure 4 below provides a summary of the instructional actions taken by the mathematics curriculum specialist to provide support to the campus's beginning teachers.

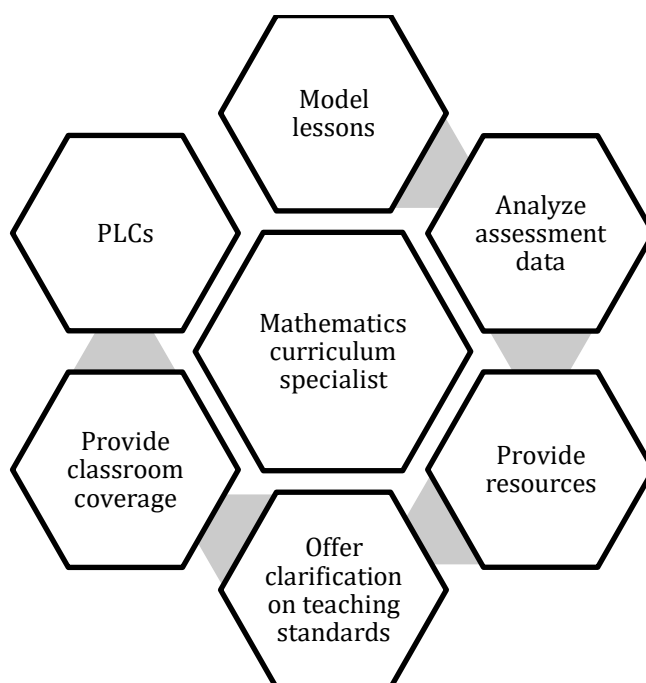


Figure 4: Actions taken by former mathematics curriculum specialist.

Current mathematics curriculum specialist. The position of mathematics curriculum specialist experienced transition as Star Elementary moved into the 2019-2020 school year. The position remained vacant until school had been in session for two months, so the mathematics teachers expressed obvious changes in their working relationship with the former and current mathematics curriculum specialist. Of the two educators who work closely with the new

mathematics specialist, both stated that she has provided teachers with various resources to use in their classroom. One teacher also stated that the new curriculum specialist had created an assessment for the team to administer to their students. However, both teachers noted that they provided constructive feedback to the curriculum specialist so they would receive resources that better align with the needs of their students. Understanding that this individual is new to the position and entered after the year had already started, teachers confided that they have taken on increased workloads as they allow time for the new mathematics specialist to familiarize herself with the position. Figure 5 below provides an overview of the instructional actions taken thus far by the new mathematics curriculum specialist to provide support to the campus's beginning teachers.

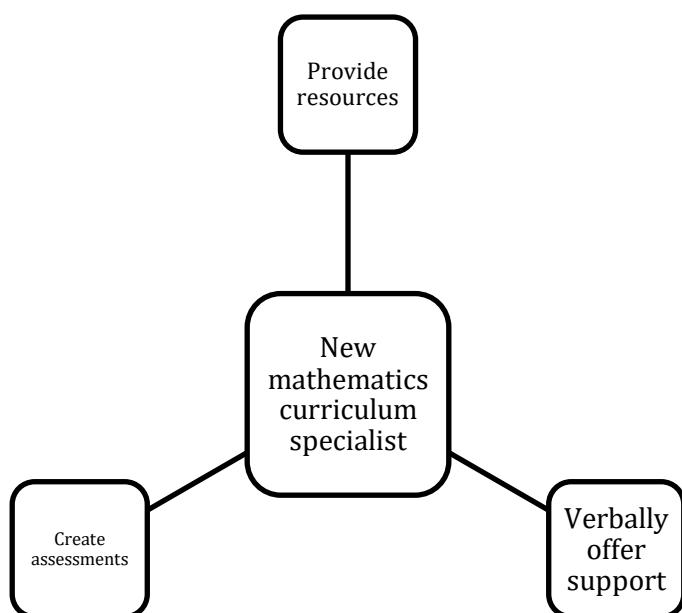


Figure 5: Actions taken by current mathematics curriculum specialist.

Reading curriculum specialist. It is important to note that the reading curriculum specialist position was in a state of transition throughout the 2018-2019 school year. As Tara mentioned in her interview, the reading curriculum specialist who began the school year in August was removed from the position in September. The position was filled by an interim employee for the remainder of the fall semester. The position became permanently staffed when a classroom teacher, Carla, transitioned to the role of reading specialist, leaving her position in the classroom in January of 2019.

Nicole shared that the interim reading specialist, the superintendent's wife, was incredibly helpful in providing teachers with instructional strategies for both reading and writing. From September to December in 2018, the interim specialist straddled the responsibility of managing multiple campuses. Once the new reading specialist came into the position in January, an obvious learning curve took place. Nicole disclosed that, as a self-contained teacher who worked closely with both specialists, a strong specialist encourages a teacher to return because they feel they can grow in a supportive environment (Long, 2009). However, a curriculum specialist who is weak in her job performance causes teachers to rethink the decision to return due to the fact that they are unsure of where to find curricular support should the need arise.

Ruth expressed that the permanent reading curriculum specialist fostered an open environment for the language arts teachers so they could share their opinions and thoughts. During PLCs, the reading specialist met teachers' needs by demonstrating flexibility with her schedule by being available when teachers required her attention and support. She also provided necessary resources teachers needed to implement quality small group instruction. Ruth also complimented the specialist's willingness to provide individualized training based on specific

teacher needs. Supports like these provide teachers a working environment that combats isolation, increasing their likelihood to return for the following school year (Ingersoll & Strong, 2004).

It is worth noting that Carla, the reading curriculum specialist, specifically stated that she felt she did not receive sufficient job training to effectively support teachers. Beginning in the middle of the 2018-2019 school year, Carla credited any success she found to the administrative team that supported her throughout her initial learning phase. Unfortunately, Carla was not provided with professional development by the district to aid in her effectiveness in her role. Learning more about the position as the year progressed, Carla performed her job to the best of her abilities. Figure 6 below provides a summary of the instructional actions taken by the reading curriculum specialists, both interim and permanent, to provide support to the campus's beginning teachers.

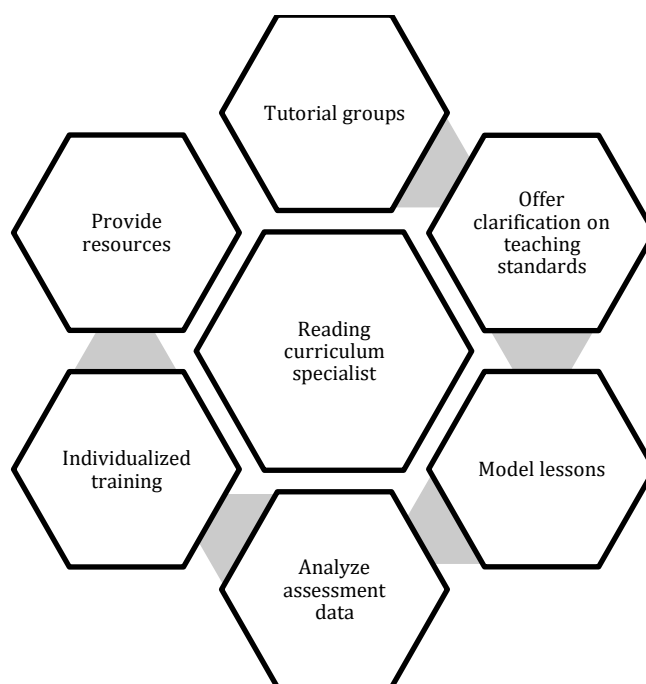


Figure 6: Actions taken by the reading curriculum specialist (interim & permanent).

Conclusion. Of the five participants in the research study, three educators worked closely with the mathematics curriculum specialist. Of the three educators who worked with the mathematics curriculum specialist, two were classroom teachers who shared their common passion for working with an instructional coach who supported them through their journey of teaching. There were also three educators who worked closely with the reading curriculum specialist. Of the three educators who worked with the reading curriculum specialist, two were classroom teachers who differed in their views regarding the practices of the permanent reading curriculum specialist.

During the conducted interviews, each participant was provided with a description of three proven effective methods of instructional coaching and asked to align the practices of their curriculum specialists with one of the provided models. The participants were then asked to determine if the curriculum specialist could be considered effective. Whereas the participants expressed varying views regarding the effectiveness of the reading specialists, all participants expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of the mathematics curriculum specialist. It can be concluded that the supports provided regularly by both content area specialists offered teachers a working environment conducive to success. While the reading curriculum specialist position experienced transition, one can determine that whether it be the interim specialist or the permanent specialist, the actions taken by the two individuals positively impacted the language arts teachers on the campus. It can be stated that the opinion of a teacher regarding the effectiveness of an instructional coach bears more importance in terms of teacher retention than

the instructional coach's performance when compared to an effective instructional coaching model.

Of the participants, four were asked their opinion regarding the value of the level effectiveness of instructional coaches. All agreed that the effectiveness of an instructional coach was highly critical in their success as a teacher. In fact, three of the four educators placed a higher significance on the effectiveness of an instructional coach than the personal bond between the teacher and instructional coach. The teachers indicated that their primary focus was the achievement and growth of their students. They explained that the effectiveness of an instructional coach affected their own effectiveness as teachers. In turn, as they grew more effective as teachers, their students' achievement and growth would increase as a result. Teachers placed a higher value on the effectiveness of an instructional coach since their ultimate goal is to grow and educate their students. One teacher did not choose one aspect of her professional relationship with an instructional coach as having more value than the other. Rather, she agreed they were both important and, in fact, having a strong relationship with an instructional coach actually maximized the coach's effectiveness on her teaching capacity.

Key Finding 3: Identified Instructional Coaching Model

Campuses and districts each view instructional coaching through a unique lens; the roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches can vary from organization to organization (Deussen et al., 2007). Though instructional coaching models may differ between locations, all instructional coaching models operate with similar fundamental structures (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). The core beliefs of instructional coaching include providing professional development to teachers that is relevant to their experiences, continuous throughout the school

year, and job-embedded (Deussen et al., 2007). Seen as content experts, effective instructional coaches are an influential support for teachers so that they may improve their instructional practices for the betterment of their students (Smith & Lynch, 2014). For instructional coaching models to be implemented successfully, instructional coaches must be provided adequate training to familiarize themselves with the model their campus expects them to execute. Instructional coaching models are designed to move a campus forward; these models provide instructional coaches with the steps necessary to balance between supporting the existing structure of a campus and motivating teachers to take risks and advance themselves professionally (Dole, 2004).

During the interviews, the participants were provided with an overview of three instructional coaching models considered to be effective in the existing literature. Participants were asked to select an instructional coaching model that their campus's curriculum specialists mirrored. The options provided were Deussen's "Teacher Oriented-Coaching (Group)," Knight's "Three Step Process" and Aguilar's Inquiry-Based and Cognitive Coaching Model. (See Appendix F).

Differing perspectives. When questioned regarding which instructional coaching model the new mathematics curriculum specialist aligned to, the participants were unanimous in stating that they had not worked closely with the new mathematics curriculum specialist for enough time to make such a determination. Focusing on the former mathematics curriculum specialist, the participants' answers varied. Two of the participants, both classroom teachers, selected Deussen's "Teacher-Oriented Coaching (Group)" as the instructional coaching model the former mathematics curriculum specialist aligned with. However, one classroom teacher also selected

Aguilar's "Inquiry-Based and Cognitive Coaching Model" and explained the mathematics curriculum specialist acted using a combination of the two models. The teachers said that they found Deussen's model to be effective because the curriculum specialist provided guidance as they worked in their grade level teams to discuss their instructional practices. One participant likened the mathematics curriculum specialist to an accountability partner for the teachers when using this instructional coaching model. In addition, the mathematics curriculum specialist was also considered effective under Aguilar's model as she functioned as a facilitator and guided the teachers through reflective conversations.

When discussing the reading curriculum specialist, the two classroom teachers who worked closely with her differed on their opinion of which instructional coaching model the reading specialist most closely followed. One participant, Nicole, shared that the reading specialist attempted to mirror Deussen's "Teacher-Oriented Coaching (Group)." However, Nicole felt the reading specialist was not effective in the use of this model because she was new to her position and needed more time to familiarize herself with the job and its responsibilities. Carla, the reading specialist, also compared herself to Deussen's instructional coaching model. However, she, like Nicole, also stated she was ineffective in the use of this instructional coaching model due to her lack of experience and training in her position. Another classroom teacher, Ruth, determined that the reading curriculum specialist aligned with Aguilar's "Inquiry-Based and Cognitive Coaching Model." Ruth felt that the reading specialist was effective using this model as she facilitated conversations surrounding instructional practices and decision-making based on relevant data. Tara, the campus principal, determined both of the curriculum specialists

utilized Knight's "Three Step Process," an option that none of the classroom teachers or the reading curriculum specialist selected.

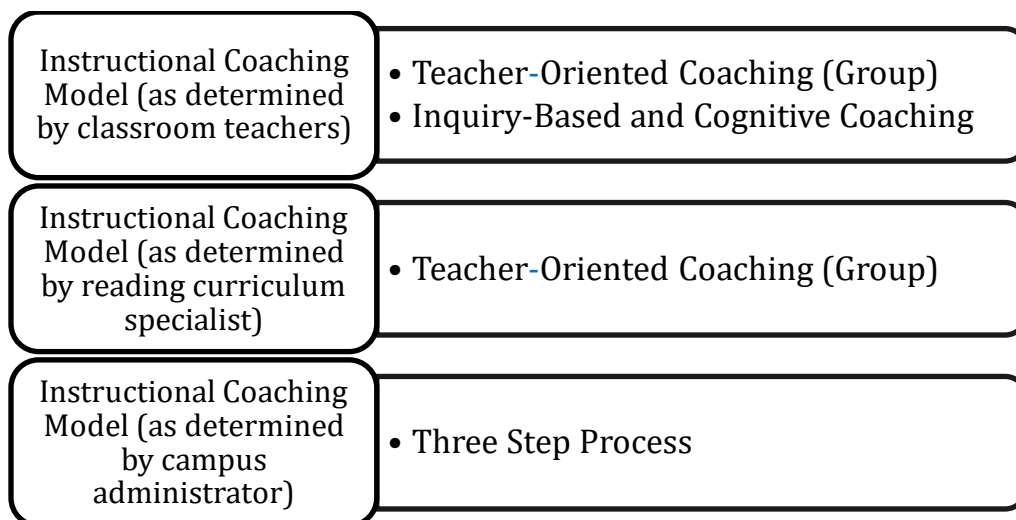


Figure 7: Instructional coaching models as selected by participants.

As summarized in the previous sections, the participants of the research study varied in their perspectives of the instructional coaching model used by the curriculum specialists on their campus. Figure 7 above provides a clear depiction of the differing views each participant held regarding the instructional coaching model followed by the campus's mathematics and reading curriculum specialists. Due to the varied perspectives of the participants, it can be concluded that clear expectations for the roles of the curriculum specialists were not established at the beginning of the school year. The campus administrator envisioned one manner in which coaching conversations would occur; however, according to the instructional coaching models selected by the three classroom teachers as well as the curriculum specialist, their interactions occurred in a different format.

Instructional coaching model and teacher retention. Of the five participants, three were classroom teachers. When they were questioned regarding the impact of an effective instructional coaching model on their decision to remain at their campus for the upcoming school year, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. One participant said that the use of an instructional coaching model would motivate her to return to her campus because the model enables her to make instructional decisions based on data and that she is also provided opportunities for reflection, allowing her to determine what her students have learned and how she can improve. Another participant stated that, whereas the instructional coaching model was incredibly valuable under the leadership of the former mathematics curriculum specialist, she could not say the same for the new mathematics curriculum specialist. Though she did state it would certainly contribute to her decision to remain at the campus or seek another job, it would not be the deciding factor.

The final participant determined that the implementation of an effective instructional coaching model is instrumental to her retention. The occurrence of in-depth discussions regarding student progress is essential to promote student growth. The classroom teacher shared that in order to create targeted lessons designed to reach all learners, instructional conversations are required. The participant explained that the use of an instructional coaching model increased her capacity as a teacher. As a result, her students' achievement levels would rise as well, increasing their deep understanding of the content. She explained that these practices are essential for her professional growth and, therefore, will affect her decision to remain at Star Elementary.

It can be concluded that the use of an effective instructional coaching model is highly valuable to classroom teachers when the model is implemented with fidelity. The use of an instructional coaching model is designed to increase teacher capacity and efficacy. Ultimately, instructional coaches are a tool for teachers to aid in their professional growth. The implementation of an effective instructional coaching model that is agreed upon by the campus so that all stakeholders share common expectations is essential in propelling a campus forward.

Discussion of Implications for District and Campus Leaders

Implications for District and Campus Leaders: Supportive Team of Colleagues

A substantial amount of existing literature speaks to the need of a positive working environment for teachers (Boyd et al., 2011; Howder, 2013; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011; Tait, 2008). All three classroom teachers mentioned the importance of surrounding themselves with supportive colleagues who operate in various capacities across the campus. Below are implications for district and campus leaders based on the participants' experiences.

Creating a positive and welcoming working environment is essential to the success of an organization and for the success of beginning teachers. Administrators' roles in fostering a favorable working environment is essential in retaining teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). As district and campus leaders attempt to drive their organizations forward, it is imperative that this expressed need is carefully considered. As campus leaders follow initiatives established to assist them in building relationships with their campus teachers, an increasing number of campuses are being led by administrators who promote a collaborative environment (Howder, 2013). By

building a community in which trust, active listening, and understanding become commonplace, administrators provide their campus teachers an environment where they feel welcome and safe.

Positive environments will continue to draw teachers to return so long as teachers feel included. When teachers are afforded the opportunity to continue to build relationships with their colleagues throughout the years because fewer teachers are seeking alternative employment, the culture of a campus will improve as relationships strengthen. The first step is to provide a conducive working environment for teachers. As this environment is established and a campus retains a higher number of teachers, building relationships naturally occurs as teachers continue to work alongside each other. Once relationships have been established and the campus is operating under a positive working environment, district and campus leaders then need to examine how their teachers' needs are being met. As suggested by Tara in her interview, teachers should be treated as individual entities. Teachers' needs and motivations are unique and, as opposed to a being treated as a collective group, they should be addressed intentionally by their administrators. Below are suggestions for district and campus leaders in order to promote a positive culture and climate for their teachers.

1. Provide team-building activities so that teachers can build relationships with their grade-level colleagues as well as other campus staff.
2. Build in time throughout the year, suggested timeline is once each quarter, for continued team-building.
3. Allow time for teachers to observe other staff members so they can learn from their colleagues and strengthen relationships.

Research by Fulton, Yoon and Lee (2005) has shown that full integration of new

teachers into their school community creates an increased level of job satisfaction for teacher, which translates to increased student achievement. This section offers recommendations to district and campus leaders to increase the sense of collaboration among their campus's infrastructure. In addition, this section provides insight into the importance of establishing a supportive network of colleagues on a campus to retain new teachers.

Implications for District and Campus Leaders: Effectiveness of an Instructional Coach

A considerable amount of research outlines the impact instructional coaches have on teacher performance (Denmark, 2013; Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Deussen et al., 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Smith & Lynch, 2014; Wong, 2004). All five participants, especially the three classroom teachers, noted the importance of working with an effective instructional coach. The three classroom teachers attributed their decision to return to their campus in large part to the curriculum specialists that supported their content areas.

Building capacity in teachers is a practice long observed by effective administrators. Some classroom teachers who aspire to attain leadership roles do not necessarily wish to become administrators; rather, they prefer the challenges of instructional coaching (Leida, 2018). Effective instructional coaches are built upon the foundation of experience as an effective classroom teacher (Smith & Lynch, 2014). As teachers continue to make the transition from the classroom to instructional coaching, district and campus leaders need to establish procedures so that these instructional coaches can continue to receive job training as they progress in their careers. Professional development should not cease once a teacher leaves the role in the classroom. Professional development becomes even more crucial when a teacher chooses to start the journey as an instructional coach midyear as Carla did.

Several districts across the nation have built time into new teachers' schedules to work closely with their content area instructional coach; this practice has decreased teacher attrition in these areas by nearly 25% (Darling-Hammond, 2000). By focusing on enhancing the skills of both existing and new instructional coaches, districts can continue to reduce the amount of teacher attrition their campuses experience. In turn, the amount of highly qualified teachers districts retain will increase (Smith & Lynch, 2014). As concluded in the key findings regarding the effectiveness of instructional coaches, the impact of an effective instructional coach outweighs the importance of a personal relationship a teacher forms with an instructional coach. This finding speaks to the importance of cultivating effectiveness in instructional coaches. As listed by Dole (2004), there are five characteristics of effective instructional coaches. By following the recommendations listed below, district and campus leaders can continue to develop the skills their current and future instructional coaches possess.

1. Build capacity in existing classroom teachers by offering leadership opportunities such as leading professional development or mentoring new teachers so they may be considered effective in their content area.
2. Offer strategies so that instructional coaches may become efficient in reflective practices.
3. Train instructional coaches to articulate their observations of a classroom teacher into quality feedback through professional development and job-embedded training.
4. Guide instructional coaches in assisting classroom teachers to advance through training on effective instructional coaching cycles.

5. Provide instructional coaches with quality professional development and authentic experiences so they may effectively organize their thoughts and actions to deliver information following a flexible schedule, sometimes with minimal time to prepare.

Highly trained and effective instructional coaches will likely result in an increase in teacher retention (Dole, 2004). As district and campus leaders seek to curtail teacher attrition in their areas, one possible strategy to reach this goal is to strengthen the quality of instructional coaches available to support teachers. As Tara stated in her interview, the more support one is able to provide beginning teachers, the more likely they will be to choose to continue in their field.

Implications for District and Campus Leaders: Identified Instructional Coaching Model

An ample amount of research has been conducted into various effective instructional coaching models. The interviews in this study focused on three: “Teacher-Oriented Coaching (Group),” “Three Step Process,” and “Inquiry-Based and Cognitive Coaching” (Aguilar, 2013; Deussen et al., 2007; Knight et al., 2015). The three classroom teachers shared their opinion on how valuable it is to their professional growth to experience an effective instructional coaching model implemented with fidelity.

As evidenced by the participants’ responses, Star Elementary had not established clear expectations for the role of the curriculum specialists or which instructional coaching model they were to follow when working with teachers. Consistency on a campus is essential for the campus’s success. If a campus continues to suffer through high rates of teacher turnover year after year, the teachers and students crave a sense of continuity during those times of frequent changes. In order to stabilize the campus, it is advised that the administrators and their leadership team set expectations for roles, such as curriculum specialists, that support the campus’s

classroom teachers. As instructional coaches support teachers in their first years of teaching, routines and procedures should be established to maximize the productivity of the interactions between the two parties (Denmark, 2013).

By following the recommendations listed below, district and campus leaders can establish clear expectations and procedures for instructional coaches to follow when working with classroom teachers. Campus administrators and the leadership team should do the following:

1. Come together and select an effective instructional coaching model supported by research.
2. Provide instructional coaches with ample training regarding chosen instructional coaching model.
3. Designate a meeting space that fosters collaborative learning and has necessary reference materials so that the instructional coaching model is evident to both instructional coaches and teachers.

It is proven that effective instructional coaching models assist in teacher development and student growth (Corbell, Osborne & Reiman, 2010). By selecting an instructional coaching model and ensuring that the campus stakeholders are made aware of their role in the implementation process, campuses can begin to curtail frequent teacher turnover by establishing and maintaining an effective method of communication for campus leaders and classroom teachers to follow.

While it is imperative that all campus teachers are provided with a supportive team of colleagues and an effective instructional coach who uses a proven effective instructional coaching model, these practices are exponentially more important to new teachers. Within the

first five years of their career, approximately 50% of teachers will leave the field of education to seek other employment (Norton, 1999). By establishing campus and district procedures to encourage the growth of these three key findings, districts can combat the rise of teacher attrition and potentially retain more high-quality teachers.

Discussion of Implications for Future Research

Implications for Future Research: Supportive Team of Colleagues

A multitude of research exists outlining the need for an encouraging working environment (Boyd et al., 2011; Howder, 2013; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kaufman & Al-Bataineh, 2011; Tait, 2008). All four participants recognized the need for support systems throughout the campus and the importance of meeting individual teachers' needs. Implications for future research are presented in the section below.

To support future district and campus leaders in continuing to build working environments conducive to teacher retention, further research should be conducted so that we may delve deeper into the support systems campuses can enact for beginning teachers. It would be especially beneficial to analyze how to strengthen relationships among campus leaders and staff members so that building a supportive network of colleagues can remain a focus throughout the school year as opposed to solely an initial focus before the school year begins. Based on the results of this key finding, the following research questions are recommended:

1. How impactful is the practice of strengthening staff relationships on the retention of beginning teachers?
2. How does the quality of relationships among campus teachers affect the retention of beginning teachers?

3. How does the quality of relationships between campus teaches and campus leaders affect the retention of beginning teachers?

While all five participants expressed the importance of teachers experiencing a strong support system on which to rely, future research should further examine which relationships are most impactful to beginning teachers to allow district and campus leaders to move forward in establishing procedures and protocols to foster these relationships throughout a teacher's first years of teaching.

Implications for Future Research: Effectiveness of an Instructional Coach

A large amount of research provides information outlining how instructional coaches can positively affect teacher performance (Denmark, 2013; Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Deussen et al., 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Smith & Lynch, 2014; Wong, 2004). Three of the participants in this research study clearly identified curriculum specialists on their campus as primary factors in their decision to remain in their current jobs. Implications for future research are examined in the sections below.

So that future district and campus leaders may sharpen the skills of current and present instructional coaches, future research should be conducted to determine the most effective ways to build capacity in these professionals. Specifically, research should be conducted to ascertain how district and campus leaders can provide effective professional development to instructional coaches so that they may more effectively support teachers and, in turn, aid in teacher retention and student success. Based on the results of this key finding, the following research questions are recommended:

1. What methods can district leaders employ to provide effective professional development to instructional coaches?
2. What methods can campus leaders employ to provide effective professional development to instructional coaches?
3. What forms of professional development provide the most impact in strengthening the skills of instructional coaches?

Implications for Future Research: Identified Instructional Coaching Model

A notable amount of research shows the importance of effective instructional models and the various manners in which they can be implemented (Aguilar, 2013; Deussen et al., 2007; Dole, 2004; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight et al., 2012; Knight et al., 2015; Showers & Joyce, 1996; Sweeney, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Three of the participants in this research study definitively stated that the instructional coaching model followed by the curriculum specialists would impact their decision to return to their campus. Implications for future research are examined in the section below.

In order to drive a campus forward, leaders in education should work to establish a clear set of expectations so that an instructional coaching model can be operated effectively on each campus. These expectations provide a guide for interactions between instructional coaches and classroom teachers. To achieve this goal, future research should be conducted to determine the most effective instructional coaching model to implement on a Title I campus that has experienced high rates of teacher turnover for consecutive years. Based on the results of this key finding, the following research questions are recommended:

1. Which instructional coaching model is most effective in overcoming inconsistencies due to frequent teacher turnover?
2. Which instructional coaching model is most effective in overcoming inconsistencies due to frequent administrator turnover?
3. Which instructional coaching model is most effective when working with teachers in the first year of their career?

Summary

In this final chapter, the findings of this study are discussed at length. This chapter specifically presents three key findings from the data collected: teachers feeling supported by a cohesive team of colleagues, the importance of effectiveness in an instructional coach, and the instructional coaching model employed on a campus. In addition, this chapter also included implications for both district and campus leaders as well as for future research so that researchers in the future may delve deeper into the topic of teacher retention connected to each of the three key findings.

Conclusion

In this study, one elementary campus plagued with frequent teacher turnover is examined in detail. Three classroom teachers, one curriculum specialist, and the campus principal shared their perspectives to gain further insight into the experiences of teachers early in their career, their experiences working closely with a curriculum specialist and how that affected their decision to remain at their campus. A strong professional relationship with a curriculum specialist was found to positively impact the teachers' decisions to return to their campus and further their teaching careers. Much can be learned from each of the participants' experiences

and unique perspectives. If teacher attrition continues at its current high rate, other interventions must be sought out so that the education of our nation's children does not suffer the consequences (Norton, 1999). This research study and others focusing on teacher retention provide possible solutions so that teachers can continue to grow in their craft and become positive role models for the children they educate.

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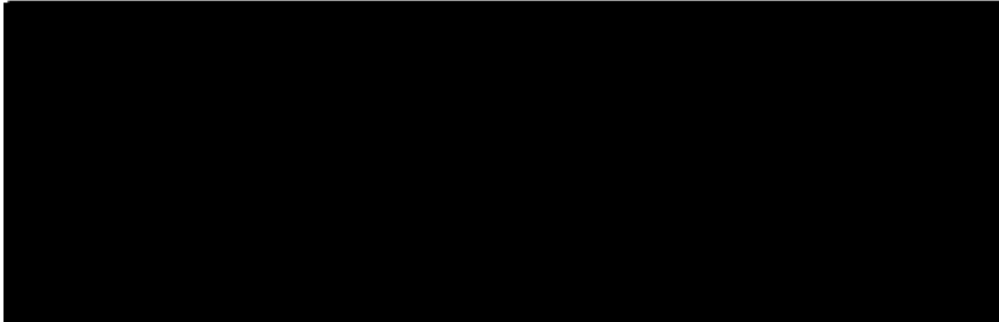
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Appendix A

Southwest School District Approval to Conduct Study



March 25, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

Please allow this to serve as formal documentation of my approval for Jasmin Russell to conduct her survey for the University of Houston Doctoral Program as a doctoral candidate.

Best regards,



Appendix B

UH IRB Approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

May 29, 2019

Jasmin Russell

jperaza@uh.edu

Dear Jasmin Russell:

On May 21, 2019, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	An Examination of Instructional Coaching and Teacher Retention: a Case Study
Investigator:	Jasmin Russell
IRB ID:	STUDY00001647
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jasmin Russell_HRP-502a.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • letter of approval.pdf, Category: Letters of Cooperation / Permission; • Jasmin Russell_Email to Subjects.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Jasmin Russell_Interview Protocol.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.); • Jasmin Russell_HRP-503 Protocol Template 5-29-2019.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	Danielle Griffin

The IRB approved the study on May 21, 2019; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review

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HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)
- Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others
- Study Closure

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office
University of Houston, Division of Research
713 743 9204
cphs@central.uh.edu
<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

Appendix C

Email to Subjects

Date: (insert)

Dear teacher,

I am contacting you today to ascertain your interest in participating in a case study I am conducting through the University of Houston as a doctoral candidate. I am studying teachers in the first five years of their career at an elementary campus to attempt to establish a relationship between direct support from an effective instructional coach and teachers' decisions to either remain at their current campus or pursue work at a different location.

If you wish to join my case study, I can ensure a minimal time commitment. I ask that you participate in one semi-structured interview where I will ask questions regarding your career decisions and experiences related to your campus. Additionally, I will ask questions regarding your experiences with an instructional coach and any potential impact that had on your career decisions. No students will be involved in this study. The time commitment for the semi-structured interview will be kept to under one hour to honor your schedule. We will be able to meet in a location of your choosing so that you feel comfortable in the environment. Interviews can be held over the phone if you prefer.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether staffing an effective instructional coach can improve teacher retention rates. As high teacher turnover rates impact our state and nation, I am motivated to attempt to find factors within our control to stem the flow of teachers exiting the field of education. If you choose to participate in the case study, please respond to my email with your consent. If you do not wish to participate in the case study, no further action is required on your part. If you have any questions, please contact me at jasmin2781@gmail.com or call my cell phone at 713-201-1450. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jasmin Russell

Ed. D. Candidate, University of Houston

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and your choice to make. Participation is not required by any entity and should you agree to participate, you may withdraw from the research study at any time by informing the primary researcher. Incentives will not be offered for involvement. Responses will be kept strictly confidential by the utilization of pseudonyms to protect the name of the school and all participants. Names will not be provided in the final case study report. The case study will also comply with all district policies.

Appendix B

First Interview Protocol (Teachers)

1. *Upon completion of reviewing the consent form.* Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we begin, can I confirm you consent to participate in this research study of your own free will?
2. How long have you been in education?
3. What is your current role (classroom teacher, special education teacher, etc.)?
4. What led you to choosing a career in education?
5. How would you characterize the level of administrative support you have received in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
6. How would you describe the professional development you have received in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
7. Did you participate in an induction program provided by your campus or district in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
8. Did you participate in a mentoring program provided by your campus or district in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
9. Can you provide a general description of your students' academic performance throughout the 2018-2019 school year?
10. Can you describe your level of satisfaction with your teacher salary for the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
11. How would you describe the culture and climate at Star Elementary in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
12. Can you describe your professional relationship with your campus's instructional coach?

- a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate on that?
13. Do you receive direct instructional support from your instructional coach?
- a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate on that?
14. Interviewee will be provided with definitions and examples of the following instructional coaching methods: (1) *Deussen et al. 's teacher-oriented coaches (group)*, (2) *Knight's 3 step process*, and (3) *Aguilar's inquiry-based and cognitive coaching model*. Which of the following models is most aligned with your campus's instructional coaching model during the 2018-2019 school year?
15. Based on the provided examples of effective instructional coaching models, would you characterize your instructional coach as effective?
16. What factors will lead you to your decision to remain at Star Elementary for the upcoming school year?
17. Did having direct support from your instructional coach affect your decision to stay at Star Elementary?

Appendix C

Second Interview Protocol (Teachers)

Reiterate purpose of study.

1. Now that you're into the new school year, can you describe how your year is going so far?
2. Last time we met, we discussed several factors that kept you at your campus. You mentioned ____ that brought you back. Have your feelings stayed the same regarding these factors?
3. Last time we met, you described the culture as _____. Do you find the culture to be the same this year or have you experienced a shift?
4. Can you describe your relationship with your curriculum specialist this year?
5. How has your relationship with your curriculum specialist changed from last year (2018-2019) to this year (2019-2020)?
6. Do you feel supported by your curriculum specialist in terms of understanding the curriculum?
7. What does the curriculum specialist do regularly to support you in your instructional practices?
8. When we met previously, you described your curriculum specialist as following the _____ model. How does this model that your curriculum specialist aligns with affect your decision to remain on your campus?
9. If we were to compare your curriculum specialist to a proven effective instructional coaching model and they were not to be deemed effective, would that affect the impact you feel they have on you professionally?
10. Does your curriculum specialist follow a coaching cycle (certain steps that are repeated)?

- a) How does this affect your capacity as a teacher?
 - b) How do these actions impact your decision to remain at your campus?
11. What matters more to you as a teacher - the relationship you have with your curriculum specialist or their level of effectiveness?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol (Principal)

1. *Upon completion of reviewing the consent form.* Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we begin, can I confirm you consent to participate in this research study of your own free will?
2. How long have you been in education?
3. What is your current role (classroom teacher, special education teacher, etc.)?
4. What led you to choosing a career in education?
5. How would you characterize the level of administrative support you have received in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
6. How would you describe the professional development you have received in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
7. Did new teachers on your campus participate in an induction program provided by your campus or district in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
8. Did new teachers on your campus participate in a mentoring program provided by your campus or district in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
9. Can you provide a general description of your students' academic performance throughout the 2018-2019 school year?
10. How would you describe the culture and climate at Star Elementary in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
11. Can you describe your professional relationship with your campus's instructional coach?
 - a) *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate on that?
12. *Interviewee will be provided with definitions and examples of the following instructional coaching methods: (1) Deussen et al. 's teacher-oriented coaches (group), (2) Knight's 3 step*

process, and (3) Aguilar's inquiry-based and cognitive coaching model. Which of the following models is most aligned with your campus's instructional coaching model during the 2018-2019 school year?

13. Based on the provided examples of effective instructional coaching models, would you characterize your instructional coach as effective?
14. Do you believe that having direct support from your instructional coach affected your new teachers' decision to stay at Star Elementary?

Appendix E

Interview Protocol (Instructional Coach)

1. *Upon completion of reviewing the consent form.* Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we begin, can I confirm you consent to participate in this research study of your own free will?
2. How long have you been in education?
3. What is your current role (classroom teacher, special education teacher, etc.)?
4. What led you to choosing a career in education?
5. How would you characterize the level of administrative support you have received in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a. *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
6. How would you describe the professional development you have received in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a. *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
7. Can you provide a general description of your students' academic performance throughout the 2018-2019 school year?
8. How would you describe the culture and climate at Star Elementary in the 2018-2019 school year?
 - a. *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate?
9. Can you describe your professional relationship with your campus's teachers?
 - a. *(If applicable)* Can you elaborate on that?
10. What do you do regularly to support your campus's teachers?

11. Interviewee will be provided with definitions and examples of the following instructional coaching methods: (1) Deussen et al. 's teacher-oriented coaches (group), (2) Knight's 3 step process, and (3) Aguilar's inquiry-based and cognitive coaching model. Which of the following models is most aligned with your campus's instructional coaching model during the 2018-2019 school year?
12. Based on the provided examples of effective instructional coaching models, would you characterize yourself as effective?
13. What do you believe is more important to teachers - the relationship you have with them or your level of effectiveness?
14. Do you believe that providing direct support to your campus's new teachers affected their decision to stay at Star Elementary?

Appendix F

3 Coaching Models Provided During Interviews

Model 1 - Deussen et al.'s Teacher Oriented Coaching (group)

Teacher-oriented coaches, as the name describes, spent their time focused on honing teachers' skills to improve classroom instruction. In this category, the coaching time was spent primarily in a small group setting rather than individual meetings. The instructional coaches pertaining to this group also spent an abundant amount of time planning for curriculum meetings and attending professional development. One can conclude that the instructional coaches were delivering professional development information in these meetings as opposed to focusing on assessment data as other models did. 21% of the instructional coaches involved in the study belonged to this category (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson & Autio, 2007).

Model 2 - Knight's 3 Step Process

Knight et al. (2015) identified a three-step process of instructional coaching to effectively work with classroom teachers: identify, learn and improve. First, instructional coaches need to identify the teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Upon the instructional coach and teacher collaborating, a goal is established and an appropriate teaching strategy is selected to achieve the determined goal. Second, the instructional coach assists the teacher in learning and mastering the identified teaching strategy. The strategy is then implemented in the classroom after the instructional coach has sufficiently explained and modeled alongside the classroom teacher. Lastly, the instructional coach monitors the teachers' progress throughout the implementation of

the teaching strategy. An important aspect of this final step is for the instructional coach and classroom teacher to determine collaboratively if the teacher attained the previously set goal.

Model 3 - Aguilar's Inquiry Based & Cognitive Coaching Model

This model is comprised of several guidelines for instructional coaches to follow. First, an instructional coach must examine student learning. As student learning is the core of education, it guides an instructional coach's path to working with teachers. In addition, the instructional coach should focus on how a teacher can alter their instructional delivery to improve student learning. Upon meeting with the teacher to reflect on their current practices, the coach works closely with the classroom teacher to facilitate the implementation of adjusted instructional practices.

Further, the instructional coach should focus on the merits of research-based strategies to continue assisting the classroom teacher. Once classroom practices have been adjusted and tailored to meet student needs, the instructional coach should assist in the development and administration of a summative assessment. The data gathered from this assessment provides data to be used for accountability and future guidance. In conclusion, Aguilar's model of instructional coaching maintains the coach's role as one who holds teachers accountable. The instructional coach's responsibility is to guide the teacher to improve student learning in the classroom and act as an accountability partner through the process (Aguilar, 2013).

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Appendix G

Transcript of First Interview with Ruth Barnes

J: Okay, so really quick, go ahead and tell me your name, please, for the recording.

R: My name is Ruth Barnes.

J: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we begin, can I confirm your consent to participate in this research study of your own free will?

R: Yes, you can.

J: Okay, thanks. Okay so how long have you been in education?

R: Um, I've been in education actually for 4 years but I've been a teacher for, I guess you could say, a year in teacher years because I was 90 days so it was a full year.

J: So your first full year was this past school year, 2018 - 2019?

R: Yes, ma'am.

J: What is your current role?

R: My current role - I am a 4th grade ELAR and social studies teacher.

J: How many blocks do you have?

R: We have 2.

J: Oh okay, so you're just partnered with a math teacher?

R: Yeah, we just switch, yes.

J: What led you to choosing a career in education?

R: Um, I've always loved, I'm a, I love being a student myself so I just wanted to instill the love for education in other students as well because I know there's a world full of teachers that, you know, just go for the paycheck. But I wanted to make sure that some students still have a chance for a good teacher.

J: Yeah, that's sweet. So how would you characterize the level of administrative support you received in the 2018 - 2019 school year?

R: Um, honestly, I felt it could have been a little bit better. Because of where I graduated from, they kind of felt like "Oh, you've got it. You know, you're good. I trust you." so there wasn't many, um, I guess you could say walkthroughs, evaluations, stuff like that besides the formal ones like TTESS. So I probably only had like 1 walkthrough and they kind of like evaluated a lesson I was doing and after that it was like, I guess it's a good thing they barely come in your room, but still.

J: Right. So then what I hear you say is you would have liked more of an administrator's presence in your room so you could have gotten more feedback.

R: Yes, yes.

J: What kind of feedback would you have wanted? Like classroom management, academics, all of it? Just like a note left on your desk? What would have been that feedback you wanted?

R: Um, just all of it as far as like, because this is, it was my first year teaching, I just wanted to know like, you know it's different from when you're learning it inside of a classroom student teaching versus when you're actually in the real world. So I just wanted to know like if it was reflecting from paper to actual, like, real world situations.

J: I see. So, how would you describe the professional development that you received in the 2018 - 2019 school year?

R: The professional development was awesome. I feel like the professional development covered many areas that I might have had a question about or just typical questions or issues that 1st year teachers might have.

J: So, your PD, was it specific to a 1st year teacher? Or, did you receive the same professional development that all ELAR teachers received?

R: Yes, I did.

J: Okay.

R: I had to do a few more, but, you know, it was fine. I had to do a few more as a 1st year teacher but then we wound up doing PD with the whole entire ELAR team.

J: Oh okay, okay. Was it focused on academics or was there, like, classroom management, like behavior strategies and stuff like that included?

R: In PDs I had to go to for a 1st year teacher, some of those kind of focused on classroom management, behavior, different things that you can do inside the classroom. And then on a level as far as the curriculum, that was mostly like, um, the ELAR team stretched across the grade levels, so it was just like all the grade levels were in the PD together for just English and social studies.

J: For that vertical alignment?

R: Yeah.

J: Okay, good deal. Did you happen to participate in an induction program provided by your campus or district in the 2018 - 2019 school year?

R: No I did not.

J: So does your district have any type of, "you're new to our district and we're going to bring you in" program that's going to last throughout the school year to support you or like a mentoring program or anything like that?

R: They do have a program with mentoring but when I came in midyear last year, it was just like the, um, it was kind of like an informal mentorship that I had.

J: And you started that last year, you said?

R: Yes, I started that and it was kind of like "Hey, do you mind helping her out this and there" but of course it was another teacher which they have their classroom and stuff that's going on too, so yeah.

J: So that's actually my next question. So did you participate in a mentoring program last year for it being your first year?

R: No.

J: Okay, so that mentoring program that you participated in that first half-year, you said the other teacher was busy, had her own class and all that stuff. So what kind of meetings did you guys have? How often? Focused on what? Anything like that, just can you tell me more?

R: The meetings that we did have, they were really small, general, basic questions. Like some of them might be "Okay, so what do you guys do at this time?", um, "How would you...", um, like "How did you plan it as far as the scheduling goes?", "How did you fit in doing this?", like "When did you do small group station time?", questions like that.

J: Okay, so like logistics.

R: Yeah.

J: So that you could wrap your head around it.

R: So that I could function, yes.

J: So do you think you would have benefitted from something where you could have asked more detailed questions so you could have grown as a teacher? Maybe something more regular, consistent?

R: I feel like I could have. Like I discussed before, the administrative team didn't really do pop-ins so it would have been great if there was like a mentor that, "Oh, I can sit in your classroom for a couple minutes and watch you do a lesson and give you feedback on that." That would have been great.

J: So can you provide a general description of your students' academic performance throughout the 2018 - 2019 school year?

R: Uh, a general description would be...

J: So if you want to start with actually telling me maybe the demographics, like the breakdown of your class, and it can be both or it can just be one. Just like, what kind of kids did you have in your class and then what was their academic performance?

R: Okay. So some of the kids that I had in my classroom, most of them were, um, most of them were African Americans. I did have some Hispanics. Um, and I want to say that I had like 5 or 6 kids that were classified as "other" because they were like Pacific Islander or something else that were, um, interracial. Um, and academic wise, the classroom that I took over, they were low. I did have a few SPED. I received a few ELL students so it was just like a mixture of academic wise. By the end of it, however, I was able to elevate some of the students. So, you know, I understood that I couldn't get all of them but I was able to see growth in some of them so that was great. For the time that I went in there, yeah.

J: So this next year that you'll be there for the whole year, do you feel like you will have a better handle on working with the kids and able to see growth?

R: Yes.

J: Maybe because you will have more time?

R: Because I will be able to start from the beginning. And even though I worked that midyear, I was still able to know that for this full year, this is how I want things to go, function. Because going into the classroom midyear, it's like everything is still... the kids are still so used to one way so they're still trying to understand like how to function in my classroom. Also with learning too, so...

J: Yeah, it's like you have to undo what has been done. So, the kids that you had last year, do you feel like you had enough support? Like, from your campus in terms of paras or aides or, even when you're planning? Do you feel like you had enough support to meet all the needs of your students? Or did you find yourself having to come up with it all on your own and maybe there were some kids you just didn't know how to reach?

R: Definitely I had help. Um, towards the end of the year, there was this program that was there for, um, students who were doing pull outs. So, some students would have pull outs for reading, mostly it was reading. Some students would have pull outs for writing and it was just the really low students that were just like, they need that individualized attention. Because for me, I did small groups, when it was about like 3 or 4 of them. But it was for students that they just needed 1 on 1 interactions, just to kind of get them a little bit more aggressive type of learning style.

J: Right, instruction. Because you can't always pull those kids 1 on 1. So, can you describe your level of satisfaction with your teacher salary for the last school year?

R: Um, well, coming in from student teaching and making zero, it was... I can't even lie, like, I looked at it and I was just like "this is gonna work". And now we just recently got a raise, like a \$4,000 raise. So I was just like, "Woah." And then coming in midyear I only got half of that salary. So that's why I was like okay, yeah, I'm not complaining.

J: So how about the step to step, that difference? Have you looked at the pay scale and that increase that you get every year? How do you feel about those increases?

R: Um, some districts they might be a little bit more of an increase step to step. However, I did kind of weigh the differences. Like even though our district may not pay more, we still have other things that we value, just from being that small district, opposed to going to a larger district and things you have to deal with.

J: Can you elaborate on that? Like what makes it worth it to you? If Southwest School District does pay a little less than other districts, what do you value about being there more so than going for the bigger paychecks?

R: Well, what I value at Southwest School District, is because we know everybody, it's such a small district, like, the superintendent can come into your classroom at any time. Like, you know people that are way up on the pyramid, you know, all the way from down the middle. And it's just like, I feel as though everybody can kind of be a big family. Like, even for professional development, we're meeting teachers that are in the high schools and intermediate schools and the middle schools as well so it's not just that you're stuck on that campus. And because it's so small you kind of have a chance to meet everybody opposed to if you go to a big district, um, and there's like so many elementary schools, so many middle schools, you don't have a chance to really like reach out to anyone and if you're trying to get in contact with, um, I guess the superintendent, just, people that you just want to meet and talk to, you don't really have that liberty of doing that.

J: Right, it's like you just want to get to know them because you're part of their district and you really don't have those opportunities. Some of those larger district have like 40 elementary schools.

R: Yeah.

J: That's a really good point. I'm glad you brought that up. So moving on to your campus itself, how would you describe the culture and climate in the past school year?

R: Um, I would say it's way better this year. Um, last year, however...

J: So when you say last year, are you referring to...

R: 18-19.

J: 18-19? Okay, yes.

R: 18-19, um, I would say the climate was kind of... honestly, it was a little bit stressful. And the only reason why I say that is because a lot of teachers had like given up close to the end of the year. And when I say given up, I mean like the negativity started to come out and like "Oh, these students, they're too far gone" or "You know, administrators, they're not doing anything about it". They started missing days, like it was... it was a lot. Just... you know.

J: So, when they missed days, were there always substitutes to cover those days?

R: No.

J: Which then, did that impact your climate?

R: [shook head] Yes. So because a lot of teachers, like I said, they had given up, so it was mostly just like they... you could tell they weren't really there for the students. So, it would possibly

like, on the same day, that morning, they were just like “I’m not coming in.” So because of that, we would have to split up all the students and then that makes it hard for us to actually teach and have instruction because there’s teachers, there’s students that, you know, they can’t sit at a desk, they’re on the floor, they’re at tables for stations, like. It was just a lot.

J: Yeah, that’s very hard. So, that “giving up” attitude, did you find that that was mostly... can you say that it was mostly veteran teachers? Was it mostly new teachers? Or was it just anybody? Like there wasn’t really a group?

R: Surprisingly, um, it was teachers... but when you say veteran teachers, how long do you mean?

J: Maybe someone who’s been there like more than 8 years. And not just at that school but someone who has taught for let’s say more than 8 to 10 years.

R: So some of them were veteran teachers, like, surprisingly. Some of them, they might have worked 5 or 6 years. Um, but then there were some veteran teachers and I just want to say that I believe that they felt as though, like, I don’t know, they’ve been teaching for so long that I guess they just had this mindset that this is how things are going to go.

J: From the past?

R: So when that school year didn’t go as planned, I feel like they just kind of gave up because they were out of their comfort zone. They didn’t really want to work as hard as they should have.

J: So did you feel like your outlook stayed positive in light of the negativity? Or do you feel like sometimes it got to you, like it brought you down?

R: Definitely I would say I stayed positive. Because even when I had, like, hard days as far as just behavior or if my students were just not getting a concept, I just went home that night and I reflected like, “Okay, what happened today that I can change tomorrow?” And then I was ready to go back. It was never a time that I was like “Oh, this day is so hard, I don’t want to go back anymore.” It was always “We had a bad day, but, like, every day is a new day.” So, it was just like meeting my students all over again, like “Nice to meet you! We gonna have a good day? Okay.”

J: That’s great. So when you say teachers might have felt like they were being pushed out of their comfort zone, do you feel like it’s because in their minds, the students had changed? Or was it district initiatives like changes in curriculum or changes in instructional expectations? Do you have an idea of what it was that made them feel like that year was different than other years?

R: It was a few changes. Um, we do have a new, she’s a fairly new principal. And, so of course she comes in with her own initiatives and things that she would like to change.

J: Sure.

R: So some teachers didn’t really like those. They felt as though she wasn’t prepared or that she was out of the classroom so long that the things that she implemented were not really, um...

J: Attainable?

R: Yeah, attainable. Um, so they were kind of frustrated with that. And then they felt as though, um, vertical alignment... the teachers that were in the lower grades were not preparing the students to come to us. Because, of course, we’re 4th grade, we’re a testing grade. So when we, you know, receive students that were in the 4th grade and they’re not having those types of things of things they’re supposed to have, like those foundational skills, it became frustrating. So that plus, um, things as far as like things we had to implement in the classroom. We’re trying to

get these students on this level, there's a new administrator that you got to get used to their way, I feel like there's just too much for some people that they're like, yeah.

J: I want to touch more on that vertical alignment piece that you mentioned. Did your curriculum specialists have any part in helping with that vertical alignment? Like, did you guys meet together as a vertical team often on campus? Did they take your frustrations in a 4th grade classroom and go to 2nd grade and say "We really need to focus on grammar, punctuation, sentence structure" or anything like that? Did they have a hand in any of that?

R: They actually did. And one thing that we just did which was super awesome, um, we had a, it wasn't even a professional development, it was a meeting. And it was pretty much all teams 2nd through 4th grade and all of the ELAR met, all of math science met, all life skills met, all the paras met, and we pretty much had to come up with an agreement on certain skills that we would all focus on and they actually made us shake on it. So it was 1st grade that had to shake on it, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade. It was, okay, what skill are we going to focus on for the kids that's something that they really needed that was straight from 1st grade? What skills were they struggling on the most?

J: And did you also feel like you had a voice in that meeting? Like the specialists really focused and they really heard you guys and what you were saying?

R: Yes, I do believe they did because even when, like I told you before, um, I don't know what her title but even the top one for the curriculum, she walked around and she asked us "Do you guys remember your goal that you agreed on in that meeting?" and we were like "Yeah." So she even came to make sure that in our planning we were implementing what we said we were so that all grade levels could be on the same page.

J: I like that. That is great. So piggybacking off of that last question I asked you, can you describe your professional relationship with your curriculum specialist? How do you guys work together?

R: The cool thing about it being such a small campus is you have an opportunity to be more personable but still on a professional level. So it makes it more comfortable because we feel as though we can share our opinions without being like "Oh no, that's not gonna work." So it's, it's a comfortable vibe like just how me and you are sitting right here, I can sit with her and discuss like, "Can we try this? Do you think that this might work? What is your opinion on this?" So I feel like they're more into like receiving things from teachers because we're the ones in the classroom so they're more open to like listening to suggestions from us.

J: That's great. So do you receive direct instructional support? You said they come to PLCs so I guess my question really is how often do you guys work together like actually sit down and work together? How many times a week? For how long? Like, what kind of support do you receive?

R: Okay, so the meetings that we have, we have PLCs every Thursday and because the specialist, she has to go to every grade level and their meetings, ours for 4th grade might be on Thursdays but for 2nd grade they might be on a different day so she's able to reach every single planning throughout the week. And then when 1st grade is planning, she's able to go to their meeting. When we're planning, she's able to come to our meeting. And she might have come to, it was a handful of meetings last year that she was able to come to. And then, if, um, our team like really really needs her input, she's available. Like "Okay, I can schedule you guys for this. Are you planning at this time? Like, she's really open to trying to figure out, "Okay, can you guys just change your planning to this time?" So it works for us.

J: So then she didn't necessarily make it to every single PLC that you had but she was a consistent enough presence to where you felt that you had her support and her guidance?

R: Yes, for sure.

J: Okay, so maybe like, can we say once a month? Or more than that?

R: We can say twice a month. It was definitely like twice a month. Yeah.

J: Do you know what else was in her schedule that did not allow her to attend the rest? Like what are the other responsibilities she had?

R: The other responsibilities, um, I know for a fact she made sure that we had all of our resources for small group. So she had, and that was for across the grade levels, so that means like for the leveled readers, she had to make sure every teacher had enough, had the correct leveled readers, um... she

J: And she does that for every grade?

R: For every grade level, yes. So leveled readers, she made sure that we had training as far as like how to do running records. She came in and individualized, like it was like if we needed individual training on running records, she was there to do that as well. Even at the end of the year, when there was an initiative to like, kind of, um, aggressively attack some of those reading skills that students were still struggling with, she even came to my classroom and sat outside on the floor with a couple of my students and did that. So that's why I said that's it's more of like, because it's a small campus, if you need something and it's doable for them, they're willing to come and do it.

J: That's great. It sounds like a good support system for you guys. So there are many different, what are considered, effective instructional coaching methods. So there are 3 different ones that I have here so this is like a supplement for you to review. There is this teacher oriented coaching in a group, there is Jim Knight's 3 step process and then on the back we have Elena Aguilar's inquiry based and cognitive coaching model. So if you can just read through, just take your time to read through those 3 models and I'd like to know which one you think that your curriculum specialist most aligns with.

R: Okay.

J: I know they're wordy, I appreciate you reading those.

R: No it's okay, trust me, I'm a reading teacher. I enjoy it.

[R reads descriptions of 3 coaching methods]

J: And if you feel the need to write on that or anything, underline something, feel free. I don't need that back.

R: I would definitely say Aguilar's inquiry based and cognitive coaching, yes.

J: Okay. Can you elaborate on that a little bit? So like this is the description but what does that actually look like when you guys are meeting and talking together? Like what of these strategies does she use?

R: So the strategies, this one mostly talked about like when they take the assessments they review and evaluate the assessments and they pretty much go off of it, I believe is the one. Um, so she would come into our PLCs sometimes after we had taken like a district exam or something like that. We would have the student scores up and she would review with us some of the specific skills the students needed the most help with and then in those meetings we targeted those specific skills and we figured out, we discussed how we're gonna actually, like, work through with the students to like kind of enhance those skills with them.

J: That's great. So then, based on this description, because this is a proven effective method for instructional coaching, would you call your specialist effective?

R: Very effective, yes.

J: That's awesome. Are there any components from these other 2 that you think your campus has as well? Like would you say she's a combination or do you think she pretty much aligns with that inquiry based?

R: I feel like she is a combination, um, which one was it... this one at the top where they went to PD, professional development, and they also focus on the teacher skills to improve the classroom. She was also available if you had any questions about instruction or if in the lesson plan you didn't know how to carry out something that was in the lesson plan that you didn't understand. She was there for you to ask questions and probably even demonstrate to you that this is what they're talking about, this is the way that you can do it, so it was, you know, it was really great that she was actually there to show you. Because some people are "I just need you to show me" type of learners.

J: Right. That's awesome. So just 2 more questions. I want to know what factors led you to your decision to stay at your school for this current school year that we're starting. So we have a decision at the end of every year: am I going to stay or am I going to try something new? I want to know why you chose to stay.

R: I actually chose to stay at Star Elementary because of the closeness and because of the access to, um, multiple pathways I guess you could say as far as the hierarchy. Um, also because although there were some negative things that some other teachers had said that had left, I was still able to see a lot of the positive things that outweigh the negative. So although we had a new administrator, although we had to implement new things that were a little bit frustrating, there was still that support there. It wasn't just like they were just like throwing us out there to drown like do this in your classroom and just go.

J: I want to ask you a few things about what you just said. So you said the administrator is relatively new. Do you know how many school years she's been there?

R: As a principal, 2. She's been an AP though, there. She's been an assistant principal but I want to say this is her 2nd year being a principal.

J: Okay. And then you mentioned closeness. So closeness like proximity to your house or like closeness in the staff?

R: No, closeness in the staff.

J: Okay, so like a family feel?

R: Yes.

J: Okay and then I also want to know more about those pathways that you mentioned. So like, what is your goal? Like, what are some different pathways you'd like to explore as you continue to further your career and move up?

R: Um, I do, like I said earlier, I am a student myself. Like, I love just the whole fact of learning. So my goals are actually just to become an instructional leader. I'm not sure if it's on the principal level but definitely an assistant principal or just someone who has a role to influence the culture of the school's campus.

J: Right, yeah, that's great. And I also want to know a little more about the new things that you guys were asked to implement because you've touched on it a few times and you said that there

was support so can you give me an example of some of the things you guys had to implement that were new?

R: Some things that were new were, uh, for ELAR it was the new acronym for writing that we had to implement like in the middle of the year. So it was like the students had to get used to, um, it was something called CUPS and... what was it? CUPS and... see, it was that new! But it was like CUPS was for revising so the kids it was something new and we had to keep on practicing and I felt like just that whole piece of them trying to learn what the acronyms mean and actually practice it took away from them actually like writing so you know that was one thing. For math, um, I can't really speak on math too much, like I know it was something new but I can't really, I don't really know what was that.

J: But regardless, instructionally, there was a new initiative for math teachers?

R: It was that and of course they initiated close to the end of the year, the pull outs. Some teachers didn't really like that because they felt like it was disrupting the class when the other retired teachers would come and get the students and help them.

J: Was it just in the testing grade levels? So it was like STAAR prep?

R: It was like 3rd and 4th grade, yeah, so it was testing grade levels, yeah.

J: Do you know if that was because, like, scores were lower last year and you needed them to improve? Or was it just because 3rd and 4th grade students showed a higher need? Do you know why they chose just the 2 grade levels?

R: I'm not too sure, that wasn't really communicated to us but I do believe that it was because they were showing that 3rd and 4th grade needed that. Because as I said before, some of the 4th grade teachers would discuss like the students are coming from 3rd grade and they don't know this and that so it was just kind of like they wanted to attack 3rd grade while they were there and then come to 4th grade and try to help them before they go to intermediate.

J: Was that pull out heavy on the reading or the writing?

R: Yeah, it was both. Reading, I would say it was heavier because reading they would probably pull out those students twice a week and writing was probably only once in a small group setting.

J: Okay. For how long?

R: Um, 30 minutes.

J: Okay. And then my last question for you is did having direct support from your specialist affect your decision to stay at your school?

R: It definitely did because my specialist is so, um, I guess you could say hands on and so, just willing to help you and assist with anything and I feel like the support is there. Because maybe if you go to like a bigger campus, you know, the support might be spread thin or you know, you might not be able to get that access to them.

J: Right. So you feel like whatever you need, your needs are met as a teacher because your specialist not only has the time but also makes you guys a priority.

R: Yes.

J: Okay. And she has the resources to do that?

R: Yes.

J: Okay. So what happens if you ask for something or you ask for guidance and she doesn't know?

R: That hasn't happened before because, or just me knowing her and how she is, I feel like she'll go "I'm not too sure about that but I'll just come back and clarify for you". Like I feel as though that's the route she would take.

J: Good deal. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your specialist or your experience at your campus?

R: Just that she's great.

Appendix H

Transcript of Second Interview with Ruth Barnes

J: Okay, so thank you for joining me. Can you confirm you are participating in this interview of your own free will?

R: Yes, ma'am.

J: Okay, so now you've moved into a new school year. When we last spoke, it was over the summer after your 2018-2019 school year. Now you're into 2019-2020. I was wondering if you could describe how your year is going so far, if you want to give me an overview.

R: So far, I would describe it in two words. It is both a little bit intense but it's very rewarding at this point in the school year. The reason I say intense is, of course, because we have so many things to turn in and the deadlines so it's a little bit chaotic. It is rewarding because of the relationships that I've gained with my students so far and just seeing a little bit of their growth.

J: That's great! Last year, you started in the middle of the year, correct? So then this is the first time you've been able to start the school year off with students. Can you tell me a little bit about that and how that's made a difference to you?

R: Um, for me it's great because I feel like this is like my actual classroom this point around. Because when I came in midyear, you know, sometimes I would still feel like it was the other teacher's class. It was great to just be able to customize the entire classroom, you know, down to the furniture and how things were set up. Even just implementing my own rules instead of having to, like, walk around the other teacher's rules just so it wouldn't be such a big change for the students.

J: That's very true. So you've been able to establish your own routines and procedures from the beginning?

R: Yes.

J: That's great. So last time we met, we discussed several factors that kept you at your campus. If you remember, the purpose of my study was to see if there is some kind of connection between instructional coaches, or in your case, curriculum specialists, and new teachers in their first or second year of teaching choosing to stay at their campus. So when I asked you last time what kept you at your campus, you mentioned that the district is small enough that everyone is very close, you have multiple pathways so that you could easily access people who were higher in the district and that's what kept you coming back. Have your feelings stayed the same regarding these factors?

R: They have. Even since I started in the beginning of the school year, I am part of the mentee mentor program. We have meetings probably like twice a month and those specialists are actually at those meetings and we're able to ask questions. They're able to help us. Actually, one of the top curriculum specialists of the district, she actually came and did a walkthrough in my classroom one day so that was just pretty, it was a little bit scary at first because it was just a random one, but it was nice to have her feedback. I did receive feedback but it was just nice to know that even though she's over the district, she was able to come to my classroom just to see. She did ask me for another, she would like to come back so that was, like, all good news.

J: That's great. So I remember you mentioned last time that you wished your administrators would have come through more often so I'm sure having someone from the district already in

your classroom has just solidified the fact that this is the district for you right now at this point in your career. That's awesome.

R: Yes.

J: So you mentioned now this year you are in the mentor mentee program. Last year, you were not. It was more of an informal thing, is that correct?

R: Yes, that's correct.

J: Good, so now you're actually part of the established district program and you said the curriculum specialists from your campus attend those meetings as well?

R: Yes.

J: That's good, so you guys are getting even more face time together so you can continue growing. So then everything you felt last year is the same. In addition to that now, what would you keep you coming back, a positive aspect, is that district presence that you've seen in your classroom and the mentoring program that you're now a part of. Is there anything else that's happened so far this year that has just made you even more certain this is the district you want to be in?

R: Um, I wouldn't say anything at this point because everything is pretty consistent as far as where I left off last year too. I don't see any changes except for the fact that I now have contact with the district curriculum specialist and just those meetings that I go to twice a month. Other than that, it's not really anything that's changed.

J: That's good. That means that there are still a lot of positive things.

R: Yes.

J: So your curriculum specialist, you mentioned that you guys worked really well together last year and you anticipated that continuing this year. So can you describe how you guys have worked together so far this year? Like, have you guys had meetings or anything your specialist your specialist has done for you or with you? Can you describe that to me in terms of the beginning of the year starting?

R: Of course. So she does come to our meetings, sometimes the PLCs that we have. At my district, we plan as an entire fourth grade ELAR team. She does come and sit in on those meetings. She'll let us know about the topics and the content you're supposed to be teaching.

J: Like your scope and sequence?

R: I guess you could say scope and sequence. So pretty much, she discusses that with us and tells us if there's any change. She's also implemented, like, maybe a week or two that we can kind of go back and spiral back in case we have a class that just did not get it. So we do have time in our schedule to go back and reteach instead of it being just like, "Okay teach this, teach this, teach this." So it's like we do have kind of like a breath of fresh air so that if we notice there is a lack in a skill that our students have not grasped yet, we can just go back to that during that week. Also, she is there to, like, clarify if we have any questions about how in-depth of a skill are we supposed to go into.

J: Sure. So you said that she implemented that calendaring for you guys to build in time to go reteach concepts?

R: Yes.

J: That's great. So she noticed what your students needed and what you guys needed as teachers and she made adjustments based on that.

R: Exactly. A lot of teachers before made comments that pretty much, like, administrators or people that are higher up no longer in the classroom... a lot of people lose that concept of a classroom teacher. Although they want these deadlines to be met, it feels great that there is someone who remembers being in the classroom, they know these students are not robots so they're not always going to get it in this time. It feels good that she remembers being a teacher and knows we need time so she gives it to us because we're teachers and still in the classroom setting.

J: That's exactly right. A lot of teachers will tell you that their first roadblock, so to speak, is that they need more time.

R: Yes.

J: So then, if I were to ask you how your relationship with your specialist has changed from last year to this year, it sounds, to me, like it has gotten better, even more productive. Can you expand on that a little? Are there other changes between what she did this year and what she is doing this year?

R: I feel like I can say that it is getting better, it is always getting better, because now she is able to provide more resources for us as well. If we're on a particular subject or something or content, then she's able to get into the meat. She gives us certain types of books or newspapers or magazines. She gets it for us. It's kind of one less thing that we have to do in the classroom and we're able to use. It kind of helps us as well, not always having to look for those types of resources. If we're trying to teach a lesson, then it's kind of like she's there if we email her and let her know we need something. She's here to help us look for it or to help us better get it easier.

J: Then she's providing you guys with those little pieces that are going to help enhance your lesson so that you can focus on the actual teaching of the content?

R: Yes, exactly.

J: So, then, I'm sure I already know the answer to this question, but my next question for you is do you feel supported by your curriculum specialist in terms of understanding the curriculum? You already mentioned that she would help clarify some standards for you guys or exactly how in-depth you needed to go with a subject. Can you expand on what those conversations look like and how you approach her when you do need help understanding your curriculum?

R: Yes. My curriculum specialist and I, we're really close, so I have not only her personal cell phone number but I do have her email in case I can't reach her through the cell phone. If I need anything, and if it's urgent, I'll reach her on her cell phone, but if it's something I need for next week, I can easily access her through email and then she's really quick to respond. She tells me she can get back to me later or she can help me at that time.

J: That's great. So then she's efficient, honoring your time as well as hers. Okay. So then what are some other things... you mentioned pulling resources and that she's easily accessible when it comes to things like you needing to understand your curriculum better. So what other things does she do on a regular basis to support you in your instructional practices? Let's say you're coming up on teaching non-fiction and you're unsure of how to teach different text features or something. What would you do if you needed help teaching an actual piece of content? How might she help you in that situation?

R: The really good thing is that she was an English teacher before she became a specialist so she's really good on remembering and still having some of those resources from when she taught

the lessons. I actually have a handful of her items from when she was a classroom teacher as well. A lot of the times when I get to a particular subject or skill that I'm not sure about how to teach, it's really easy for me and she's a really welcoming person. It's like her motto is "No question is a dumb question," so it's just like I feel as though as a teacher, I feel comfortable going to her and asking her questions for clarification. My thing is, I would rather ask her than teach my kids something wrong because I wasn't sure and I was afraid to ask.

J: And it sounds like she has the same mindset as well. You guys are both doing what's best for kids, whether you have to ask a question and she has to answer or you just know what to do on your own. That's good because it all comes down to what's best for kids.

R: Yes.

J: So then my next question for you is when we met previously, you described your curriculum specialist as following Elena Aguilar's inquiry based and cognitive coaching model. That, to refresh your memory, that model is when the specialist or instructional coach sits with the teacher, examines student learning, they create an assessment, review assessment data, make decisions based on that data so then the teacher can go and adjust their instruction. For example, if students scored really highly, then the teacher would be able to go and extend their learning. If the students scored poorly on an assessment, the teacher would go and do an intervention or reteach. After that, they collect more data and the instructional coach guides the teacher through that as well. Do you still feel like your curriculum specialist aligns with that model? This is something that you guys will do this year in PLCs?

R: I definitely believe so. One reason that I know is that we had our PLC and the principal did sit in. She did let us know that it's highly, highly wanted that we not just focus on our low kids or our average kids. She wants us to also focus on those kids that are high. She wants us to push them more, even if it's implementing, like, a "when you're done" folder in the classroom and an extension activity that they can work on the entire week when they're done. Just something as simple as that, just to have those kids not be too comfortable being high and we're not pushing them to keep on growing their skills instead of having them become stagnant.

J: So you're addressing the needs of all your learners, rather than focusing on your struggling learners?

R: Yes.

J: That's great. So your curriculum specialist following this model of the assessment and data-driven decision making and then adjusting teaching after that... do you feel like that model that your specialist operates under, do you think that that impacted your decision to stay on your campus? You found that model to be effective and helpful so you chose to stay?

R: Um, I really do believe it is effective. Because for me, the way that we know what our kids need is from just data and trying new things. Even making sure the things that we're assessing them on aligns with what we're supposed to be teaching. That helps, as a teacher, to know if the kids are understanding or do I need to go back and reteach. It helps a lot with reflecting on teaching skills as, also with how much students are learning and what is something more than I can give them so they can learn better?

J: So then, we know your curriculum specialist follows this model, this inquiry based and cognitive coaching model. This model has proven to be effective. Let's say that your curriculum specialist was to get evaluated by your administrator. Your administrator was to come to the conclusion that the specialist is not effective. Maybe she doesn't follow the model or she is not

effective in her position because she's new, something like that. Would that affect the impact you feel she has on you? So if someone else in the district were to say that your curriculum specialist was not effective, would that make a difference to you personally?

R: It would not make an impact on me, only because, you know, some people have their own opinion. You have your own opinion and your own experiences with people. So if my experience with that person is a great one, it would be really hard for me to change that idea unless that person were to change that idea. So I would have to see that, not just hear it, even though I would hear that from an administrator, I would still have to see that for myself.

J: Right. That makes sense, you would have to see it in your classroom.

R: Yes.

J: So then, my next question is similar to the coaching model but this one more focuses on a coaching cycle. This could be something initiated by your campus or by your district? Does your curriculum follow a coaching cycle? These could be certain steps that your administrator wants her to take, like every week in PLC we do something different but it's a sequence of events that repeats itself. Do you guys have anything like that on your campus?

R: Um, I don't believe we have that at my campus as far as now. I'm not sure what the future holds but I don't believe that we have that now at this time.

J: Okay. So let's go back to the coaching model itself. So your curriculum specialist follows the coaching model, the assessment and data-driven one. How does that affect your capacity as a teacher? She follows this one particular model; how do you think that benefits you?

R: Um, just consistency. It kind of lets me know what to expect and it may be easier that it's one less thing that has to be changed in my daily schedule or in my daily teaching. It's kind of like I already know what to expect.

J: You guys already have a system working and you know what comes next. So how do those actions impact your decision to stay at your campus? So if you think about the whole year and you guys are constantly going through this coaching model of looking at data, making teaching decisions based on that and then making adjustments moving forward, how do you think that will sculpt you as a teacher by the end of the year? How will that affect your decision to stay at your campus?

R: I believe that it will help me a lot as a teacher because if my kids are not understanding it one way that I teach it, then I can better equip myself with more effective techniques and strategies that I can use to teach those skills and subjects. Of course, it will allow me to want to, like, it will better me to want to stay at that campus because I know that it's a growing campus. So I know it has the ability for me to grow and better myself in that profession.

J: So kind of touching on that, I'm going to take a little side trip here. When we last spoke, you mentioned that the culture that you experienced on your campus was that teachers felt overwhelmed, some teachers had the attitude of having given up. How have you seen that shift going into this school year? Or have you even seen a shift? Is it the same?

R: I have seen, it has been a dramatic shift. Unfortunately, a lot of teachers did leave. Some of those, they were overwhelmed and some, I don't believe they were right for the profession. They realized that. The really cool thing about this semester, which, I mean, not this semester, this school year, that has made it more likely for me to stay is because of the new people that were hired. Some of them were new teachers so, you know, they haven't gotten the opportunity to kind of, I guess, be overwhelmed, if you could say. It's just a really positive vibe, you know, it's

people that actually want to be there. They come to work on time, they're driven, they're hardworking, it's a different atmosphere. Although we are stressed, sometimes with the deadlines, I feel like all of us are on the same page as far as, like, we can work through it. Even if we're overwhelmed a little bit, there is always someone who is going to help us through it. Even the new teachers who were hired this year on my team, of course they're overwhelmed because they're fairly new to the profession, so it's really cool that I'm there to, like, share my experiences with them and they share theirs. It's kind of like we can come to an understanding of what might work, just to help them out to want to stay.

J: So it sounds like you guys really have a family feel where everyone is in it together and you guys are all looking to be successful.

R: Yes.

J: That's great news. So I'll go back to my questions about your specialist. You already touched on how someone else's opinion or evaluation of your curriculum specialist would not affect your opinion of her because your opinion is based on your experiences. So what matters to you more as a teacher - the relationship that you have with your curriculum specialist or her level of effectiveness? Does that make sense?

R: Yeah, no, it makes sense. Um, that's a really good question. I want to say both but it kind of feels like my answer is leaning towards both. Of course before we even started implementing her skills, you know, of course you have to meet this person before you actually start getting into the feel of working with them. Even before that, me and her did develop a really good working relationship that kind of assisted with her skills and it helps more that she's skillful. It was like, um, although she's a really good person, she's also a really good specialist so I wouldn't say that it's just because I like her as a person, that's the reason why I prefer her as my specialist. It's also because she is very skillful. So I think with that question, it kind of works hand in hand. Um, yeah, I guess that's the best way that I can answer that. It kind of works hand in hand.

J: So what I'm hearing you say is that she is effective because as a professional, she is able to help you grow, right?

R: Yes.

J: So she pushes your professional growth but then you also like her on a personal level so when you put those two together, it maximizes the effectiveness that she has on your professional development.

R: Yes. That would be the perfect way to sum it up.

J: Perfect. Alright, well those are all the questions I have for you today. Is there anything you want to add at all about the school year, how it's different from last year, working with your curriculum specialist, anything else you think that would be important for me to know?

R: Um, just that I feel, because this is the beginning, and it's such a positive mindset, I believe that it can only get better from here. If we're actually working just like we're working now and we work this entire school year, I feel like we will have a very successful school year.

Appendix I

Transcript of First Interview with Nicole Collins

J: Okay, so thank you for joining me today. For the sake of the recording, can you state your name?

N: Nicole Collins.

J: Thank you. Can you also confirm that you are consenting to participate in this research study of your own free will?

N: Yes, ma'am.

J: Great. Alright, can you go ahead and tell me how long you've been in education?

N: This is my third year that I've been a teacher.

J: And where do you work?

N: At Star Elementary.

J: What is your current role there?

N: I'm a 1st grade self-contained teacher.

J: Right. So what led you to choosing a career in education?

N: I thought that... before I graduated college I was on one path to finish one, a different kind of career, but after finding out that I was pregnant and being able to not work in the other career that I wanted to, I figured that teaching would always be a good option for me, especially as a parent and it has a lifestyle balance and it would be able to provide me with time with my son. It would also be able to provide me with benefits that I needed and I've always wanted to be a teacher but it was always like on the back, you know, the back side of my brain but it's something that I like and I've always worked with kids, even in my own community. I've tutored kids since I was like 13. I've tutored, like, all my nieces and nephews any time they needed help with homework, even the ones starting college. Literally two weeks ago, I went and showed my cousin, like, "Okay this is your university", and how to get there. You know, helping kids and educating has always been in, like, in my blood, I guess you could say. My grandmother was actually a teacher in back where my mother is from in Bangladesh. She actually opened up a school for, like, orphans and stuff. So it's like, different things like that added up and accumulated to me being like, you know what? Let me try teaching because, honestly, in the long run, it's people who have a steady job like teachers who are able to, you know, who are actually able to retire, to be honest. In other jobs, you're going to be working until you're dead and it was a better decision I think that I made instead of going back towards what I had originally planned.

J: Right. So it sounds like it was ingrained in you even though it wasn't your initial path, like it was always a part of you so it was like a natural transition.

N: Right, exactly.

J: So, let's talk about your 2018-2019 school year and then any information you find relevant from the year before that you can kind of throw in to give some background or precedent.

N: Okay.

J: So how would you characterize the level of administrative support you received in the 2018-2019 school year?

N: Um, I don't think it was very... very present. We did, our administrators, they were very nice and they were always very caring but I think it was the fact that we did have a new principal at that time, she was trying to get a hold of everything that had happened in the last few years and trying to fix everything at once. And it was kind of difficult for us because I think all the administration was focused on fixing and they didn't spend enough time with the teachers, like on a one-on-one level. Based on my year before, because there was so much change going on that they were trying to figure out how to change everything without it necessarily affecting us. So they were a little bit absent, to be honest in our everyday lives.

J: So I want to touch on a few things you mentioned. You mentioned that they were trying to fix problems or issues that were currently present. Can you talk about maybe what some of those issues were? Was it because administrators were new? How long were these issues present? Can you just kind of talk about that a little bit?

N: So when they were trying to fix problems, the year previous, the 2017-2018 school year, we had a different principal and she had been principal for a little while before that and our school before used to be two separate schools. It used to be a Pre-K through 1 side and then there used to be a 2 through 4 side. So they used to literally have 2 different principals in one building.

J: And right now you guys are Pre-K - 4?

N: [nods]. So the first year I got there, 2017-2018, that was the very first year that they had become Pre-K through 4. And so there was a lot of issues in the sense of, like, getting everything put together, being called one school instead of two. So there was a lot of things left undone from whenever the first principal retired. So then when this year came along, we had a new assistant principal, we had someone who was a teacher before become an assistant principal. She was previously a teacher and then my assistant principal, who was like the head assistant, became the actual principal. And so her kind of balancing being a principal versus an assistant principal and having that authority figure and now we're like a full-fledged Pre-K through 4, we're not Pre-K/1 and 2 through 4, we're completely Pre-K/4. So I think that was a challenge for her and...

J: So, let me make sure I understand. So the transition, 2017-2018, the transition started joining 2 schools and 2018-2019, the assistant principal was now principal and she was continuing that transition.

N: [nods].

J: Okay, we'll move on. So how would you describe the professional development that you received in the 2018-2019 school year? And it doesn't have to be during the year, it could have been part of your inservice or maybe summer trainings that you had to prepare for that school year.

N: Um, I think the trainings that we did have, like let's say for example start with inservice and the ones that I went to over the summer, they were actually pretty good. It did help me get some tools, like our math inservice was very helpful. They showed us like hands-on activities that we could do with our kids and she gave us a really great book, our math specialist at that time, she gave us a really great book, Number Talks. It's easy, it's simple for us to understand and for us to relay back to the kids. She was even showing us the supplies that they bought, the boxes of like the different curriculum kits they had gotten and so our math one was excellent, to be honest I think. But our reading and writing one was a little... it was a little rushed, I felt, because at a school like ours where our deficit is reading and writing, where we have so many kids reading

below level, I would have liked a bigger focus on the reading and writing inservice. I'm not saying math is not important, but we're doing fairly okay in math.

J: You have to identify your need and address it, yes.

N: Exactly. If you cannot read, you cannot do any other subject. That's the core of everything. So the year before when our other principal had left, our reading specialist had left also. So, over the summer, we didn't have a new reading specialist yet because they were in the process of hiring someone so we had our superintendent's wife, she has a Master's in like curriculum and all that and so she's very good at reading and writing. She was a teacher for 25 years and so she came in the end of my first year (2017-2018) and kind of was like a mentor also and she was kind of helping everyone around campus with reading and writing. And so she did a few inservices for us in the summer but they were very last minute. So a lot of people couldn't attend, a lot of people were out of town because we weren't told back in May and as teachers who only get 3 months off, we plan. That's the, like, main thing we do, we plan ahead of time so I think a lot of it was rushed. And then when we came back to inservice, like for the ones that were, like, mandatory, there were like 3-4 hour sessions which it was decent enough but I wish there had just been more of a focus on that because not only do we have to worry about our elementary level but we have to as a district. So we had to spend a lot of time doing district stuff like, you know, like, active shooter training, bug control, how to, you know, just do other stuff so we were trying to weave in so many things at once with 5 days' worth of time, it wasn't enough.

J: So what would you have wanted? If you could say maybe 2 focus areas that you would have rather seen at your PD, what would those be?

N: Definitely a more in-depth training about, like, Daily 5 because they were pushing Daily 5 at our school and a lot of us, especially me being brand new, I didn't know what that was and a lot of people didn't know. Like, they were doing Daily 5 but they didn't necessarily call it Daily 5 but that was just part of their classroom routine and they were really focused on us doing that. And part of small group instruction and a lot of people were confused on how to do it so maybe if that was something that they were so adamant about looking for during the year they could have spent a little more time really doing it for us and even for the older teachers just to refresh on how it should be done because just because you're doing it in your class doesn't necessarily mean that it's what they're looking for. So something like that and maybe something along the lines of, like, how to deal with classroom management a little bit more. I know they tell all the teachers, like, if you need help with classroom management, go take it individually on your own but maybe for them to have, like, a whole school classroom management because as an entire school we face a lot of behavior issues. It makes it very hard for teachers because we get frustrated so easily because if you're dealing with students who can't read or write and then on top of that they have behavioral issues, it's a very hard task. It's not not doable but it just makes it ten times harder to do it.

J: It can be very challenging.

N: So I would definitely say something along the lines of Daily 5, which incorporates reading and writing, and a school wide, like, behavioral system or maybe like a school wide change that would have started or talked about how to help the problems that we were about to face in the fall.

J: Right. Okay, thank you for sharing that. So, when you started, your first year at your school was 2017-2018?

N: Yeah and I actually started in the middle of October because of a natural disaster [name omitted to protect anonymity].

J: Oh, can you tell me more about that?

N: So before I, I was applying to other schools in like June, July and August, and the school that was in my neighborhood that I actually had gotten a position with, ended up getting flooded by a natural disaster so they completely shut down the school and they were no longer doing new hires. I was like in the process, I hadn't gone through. So they weren't doing any more new hires, some of the teachers had to quit also because of their house being, you know, ruined. So they had to relocate that entire school to another elementary school down the street from my house. So they were like "Sorry, we're not accepting any more people. You know, it's something out of our control because of the natural disaster." So then, that was at the very last days of August, that's when it happened. So all of September people were trying to like, you know, figure stuff out and then in October, through my alternative certificate program, I took Texas Teachers, and so they had an online, like, job fair because a lot of schools were now looking for replacements and looking for new teachers and stuff. So then I found Southwest School District was one of the ones on our online job fair and so that's when I was..., all you had to do was like pick a school and wait to chat with like somebody from their school who's like representing their school. And I actually, it was my assistant principal and I didn't know that at the time that it was her and I was chatting with her and she's like "Tell me a little bit more about yourself," and then she was like "Okay, would you be interested for an interview?" And so I came in the first day of October. I interviewed with her and then I ended up starting like on the 15th of October.

J: Okay.

N: After interviewing with her and my principal at the time and the other assistant principals and everybody, I came in a little late and I was also the 12th teacher added to the group because there were so many kids in the 1st grade so they took, like, 3 or 4 kids per class and built a class for me.

J: Right.

N: Um, and to be honest, it was a terrible class because all the teachers that didn't want those kids pawned them off on me.

J: It was the teachers' choice?

N: Yeah.

J: I see.

N: And admin had a final say at the end but at that point, they were desperate because we had like 28 kids, 29 kids in the classroom. That's not acceptable.

J: No.

N: So they were just doing whatever they could to please those teachers at the time and kind of pawn whoever off on me. And that was told to me by another teacher who I became best friends with over the year. She's like "I'm so sorry". I was like "What are you sorry for?" She told me, "At the beginning of the year, they told us to get rid of whatever kids we needed to. We couldn't give you all of our, you know, bad ones but we... some of us were only willing to sacrifice like one out of like three kids to give to you that were good but the rest were just the kids that were bad. And you got that." So I ended up with 19 boys and 4 girls in my class. That was my first year so it was a rough year because of that. And I had no PD because I started in October and that was my very first year. So when I came in to my 2nd year transitioning to 2018-2019, I was

expecting a lot more from professional development and I kind of felt a little underwhelmed. I was like, eh, okay, you know? I did my main courses about like, get to know the TEKS. Do one math, one science and reading because I'm self-contained but it felt like there wasn't a major focus. It was just, they were just trying to hit a little bit of everything.

J: Right. But not anything really in depth?

N: Yes.

J: I see.

N: Yeah.

J: So in that first year, and it sounds very challenging already, in that first year did the district offer you any type of induction program? Something that might have lasted the entire school year to help support you? Or even something that just lasted the beginning of the year but that was kind of meant to bring you into the district and show you the ropes, so to speak?

N: Um, well they had a mentor-mentee program which was like a veteran teacher who was my mentor and I will tell you to this day she is one of the reasons why I survived the school year. She was an excellent mentor where she took care of me like I was her daughter, honestly, and she would come check on me and she was like "Okay, let me help you with this, let me show you this." And I was really nervous because it's also, after me graduating, it's the first time having a career job, so it was very intimidating but everybody on the team was so welcoming, they were so loving. They were like "Hey, we've been first year teachers at one point in time, we completely understand what's going on." And my mentor, they had that and so like my assistant principal, because she was also my appraiser at that time, she would come in and check on me and my mentor, see how we're doing, and what do we need. And she even had some days where like I just needed help with my classroom, I didn't know how to set it up, I didn't know what functionalities they wanted in the classroom. She gave me an entire day. I was able to have a day where she called a sub for me and I was able to just work on my classroom myself, like, go outside, sit in her office for the entire day, get everything printed out, get things laminated, just set up because I was never actually given the chance to set up.

J: Right, because you started in October.

N: Exactly, in the middle of October.

J: So that was actually my next question, a mentoring program. So was that provided by the campus or was that provided by the district?

N: By the district. Yeah, because every new teacher at Southwest School District, whatever school you're at, even if you're at the high school, you're awarded a mentor.

J: So, did you guys have to follow certain criteria, like meet a certain number of times, turn anything in? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

N: Yeah. So when someone is assigned to be a mentor, they're given this big binder that has a bunch of checklists in it and like it was split up by like, okay, the first time you meet, these are the 5 topics you should be discussing. And then it says, like, the second time you meet, you should be discussing this. And then the third time you meet, the mentor has to go back and check that the mentee has been doing all this. And there was even a portion on there where the mentor is given a 45-minute time that they have to pick between the first three six-weeks to come in and observe the mentee to see if she is struggling, you know, things like that. We had to turn it in at the end of every six-weeks. They would check the binder and it was a binder between the two of us so she kept, like, she was responsible for it but I would have to turn in paperwork to her to

show like oh, this is what I did. Like even simple things, like does she have a class roster? Does she know how to put in her attendance? Things like that. So, in that sense, I was prepared a lot because I would literally text my mentor at 2:00 in the morning like, "Hey, I'm freaking out. I was supposed to do this tomorrow." And she was like "Okay, let me help you." So that really eased my whole time.

J: That's good.

N: My assistant principal was hand in hand with her. And she would personally come in and check on me and be like "Okay, what do you need? What are you missing? Do you need some aides to come help you in the room with like fixing your walls, grading papers or things like that?" So she was, it was both, between the two of them, was how I survived.

J: That's good. Did you have anything like that in your second year? Anything official? Aside from just like the friendships that you built?

N: The second year I didn't because I was no longer considered a new teacher.

J: Right.

N: Which I still felt like I was, because one full year would have been in October. But I also, from the state, I did have the person who was in my program. He would come in and do observations for me and he came in like 3 times a year. So he came in 3 times my first year and he told me like "Oh, you're doing horrible right now at the beginning of the year." And I was like, "Oh, thanks." He was, he was just very blunt and he was like "Yeah, you're going to have to spend more time getting to know these kids and this and this and this." And he's like, "I understand your situation is difficult but you need to like toughen up and like, you know, lay down the hammer." And I was like, "Okay. Yeah." But by the time he came in to see me for my last one in October of 2018, he was like "I don't even need to be here. Like, you're doing great." He's like, "You're doing excellent." It was a hard transition, you know dealing with behaviors and students who are low and then being a first year teacher and trying to get a hang of things. There were nights that I would stay up until 2:00 in the morning grading papers and my husband's like, "This can't be normal. Like I don't think other people are doing this." And then I talked to a lot of people, like, oh, that's everyone's first year, you know. You don't know how to manage your time your first year because you're trying to get so much done and also being self-contained is very difficult because you're trying to make sure I get everything and I'm trying to get enough instruction in the whole day but there's so much to do in a day it's insane. It's insane.

J: I know, it is a hard problem. So kind of touching on that, how you mentioned grading papers and your students were a little low, can you give, for last year, 2018-2019, can you give me a general description of your students' academic performance? Maybe the breakdown of your students, like did you have a SPED cluster, did you have a group of ELLs, any GT? Just like kind of include some sub-pops in there.

N: Okay, yeah. So my class last year, comparing them to the first year, they were even lower than my first year. They, in regards to academics, they were low. I did have two kids who were GT in my class and I had one ELL and then the rest were, well, and then one who was considered SPED, yeah, and the rest of them were just you know, regular, you know regular classroom general education. And the majority of them, when they walked into us, into the first grade, after the summer, they were all, I would say about 90% of my class was reading below level.

J: Wow.

N: And the interesting thing was when they left kindergarten they all said that, I'm just going off of when the teachers had DRA'ed them, you know, tested them to see what levels they were, and they said they were all on level. And so I guess over the summer they had regressed and it was major because the school was expecting us to have them reading on a certain level but if you come in at the beginning of the year and you're already below level, it's just a little more push that I have to do, even two levels. And so throughout the school year I noticed that the group of kids I got last year was similar to the group of kids I got my first year. I don't know, it might be a myth, but all first year teachers or like new teachers always get the bad class and I guess I got that two years in a row. To be honest, everyone in the first grade was like "Oh, we don't know how you deal with these kids. We don't know..." and like, I had a lot of special cases of different kids who have like home issues and all that so their academics were really low. I have like maybe a handful that were like above level or on level and they were progressing throughout the year but then I had a lot that like, my small group was like 10 kids at one point because like I couldn't, it was so hard. They're like group them based on their level. I was like "Well, they're on this level..." and it's like, it was a hump to try to push them up and I felt a lot of it was one sided because I didn't have a lot of parental involvement in their lives. Or like even communication, I couldn't get a hold of a lot of parents and I couldn't like let them know, "Hey, check your child's folder, there's a report in there." You know, like, tons of situations like that so it was difficult because they were so low and I think in my eyes the kids who came to me below level, I was able to get them 4 or 5 levels up by the end of the year but by the school's standards, it's still not on level, you know what I'm saying? But to me, I think that's a major accomplishment for a child alone.

J: Yes, you focused on progress.

N: Exactly, and as a school, we were looking at like each class, like each teacher, how many students do they have on level? But I don't think that's fair because I think you need to look at where this kid came from, what level, and where they're at at the end of first grade. They may not necessarily be ready for 2nd but they're a lot closer than they were when they came in. So...

J: You make a valid point, that's very true.

N: I'm not saying it's on us, but I'm sure lots of schools, they just look at general numbers. They don't look at individual kids because there's like 3 or 4 hundred kids in first grade so, you know, it's like, how are you going to look at each individual kid? But I focus on my 26, that's it. I've known them for the whole year and I'm only going to focus on "Oh wow, this kid came in on a Pre-K reading level and now he's leaving at a middle of year first." That's improvement for a year, you know, so that's it.

J: Yeah, you should be proud of that progress. So, can you describe your level of satisfaction with your teacher salary for last year?

N: On a scale of 1 to 10, I would say like a 4.

J: Tell me more.

N: I don't think in general any teacher gets paid enough no matter where you work because it's such a hard job and I could be biased, of course, but I think that for the level and the amount of hard work that we do and with the situations and the cases that we do have in our classrooms and we leave our family for the whole day and our own kids to come spend time with other kids to try to educate, to try to help them, I feel like we should have gotten paid a little bit more. It was, better than not getting paid at all...

J: Sure.

N: ...so I appreciate that and I'm 100% grateful for that but it just shows, like, okay, we're not appreciated enough. But I don't know if that's something, because that was among all of us, and I was a young teacher so I get paid less than the teachers who have been teaching for 20 years. But I don't know if that's something that financially as a district they're not able to do. You see what I'm saying?

J: Yeah, I think that's pretty common amongst the teaching profession.

N: Okay, because...

J: And then we also got a raise, the state mandated a raise so that was helpful. So what keeps you coming back?

N: [sighs] I look at these kids and I, inside of me, I'm a mom also, so I understand what a lot of them are going through and a lot of them have things beyond their control. Their outbursts in class, their anger, their temper tantrums are not necessarily coming because they're at school. They could be home related. That was one thing though that our administration did, they pushed a lot to build relationships with these kids because like I would know everything about these kids in and out and like "Oh, you're having a bad day. Did this happen at home?" And he's like "Yeah, my mom got mad at me and she gave me a whooping last night." I'm like "Okay, well we'll try to have a better..." you know, it's things like that that keep me coming back because I feel if I'm not doing it for these kids then who's going to do it? There's hundreds of people probably who could do it but not that many people want to come to a school district where there's so many behavior problems, our performance is low, our student population is very economically and socioeconomically low and so it's basically a Title 1 school so a lot of people are not going to want to go there. It's easier to be like "I'm just going to go to a nice, you know, relaxing school where there's not many issues and low students" but there's something inside of me that's like no matter what I go through all year, helping them and seeing them at the end of the year crying, "I don't want to go back to..." you know? It makes it worth it. And honestly, the team that I had last year, like every year that I, the last two years, that I've been in 1st grade, like, the team has been amazing. Every single teacher and literally from last year, my two partner teachers because we were in a three-way split, they're literally like my best friends and we go out to eat every day, and neither of them work here anymore. They both went to different schools but we call each other, we have a group message, we're like "Okay, what are y'all doing? Let's go out to eat." or "Let's go get our nails done." So we're very close and that also brings me back.

J: Having a cohesive team does make a huge difference.

N: Yes.

J: So, you're like leading right into my next question. So how would you describe the culture and climate at your school? So I know that you have a strong team, a team that you're very happy with, so you guys, it sounds like, have a positive culture amongst yourselves, but how would you categorize the entire school?

N: I think if you see the interaction between Pre-K through 4, all the teachers walk in the hallway.

-----pause in recording-----

J: Okay so how would you describe the culture and climate at your school? So we kind of left off with you telling me a little bit about how it was a pretty positive culture, the staff members were

very close. However, there were a lot of changes that were implemented throughout the year and those kind of caused, like, some dips in morale. Can you just expand on that a little bit?

N: Yeah, so as a first grade team we were great but also just as a campus if any of us like, if I ever went up to a 3rd or 4th grade teacher and wanted to have a conversation or needed help or anything, everyone was always kind of there for each other because we're such a small campus and everyone kind of knows each other even if you don't know them by name you know them by face, like "Oh hey, how are you?" and stuff. So whenever new things would be introduced to us and it was a learning curve for all of us because we're all trying to juggle so much on our plate that whenever something new would come in, we would all feel a little bit down. And like you said, like a dip in morale would go down but we all kind of knew we were in it together so it made it positive in that sense like, "Hey I'm not the only person being targeted," you know, having to do this by myself.

J: When you're fighting the same battle, you feel like a team.

N: Exactly. And we had the same things to complain about.

J: So I know you mentioned there was a lot of turnover in your reading specialist and we can focus on the math specialist since you worked with them more. So can you describe your professional relationship with your campus' math specialist? Just how you guys worked together and how you interacted.

N: She was very present, she was always there. She was able to always be at every single one of our PLC meetings and she was there besides that if you just emailed her or called her like "Hey, I need to meet with you. I don't understand what's going on." There was also a time I also remember that one of our teachers had given a test, one of our middle of year tests or something, and all her kids bombed it and she sat there with the math specialist. She went over every single question and she was like "Can you tell me what this is?" And she sat there and was like "Okay, let's go through it all. Let's see why your kids did so poorly on it and like maybe we can have a retest, like make up a different test to see if it was like the wording of the problems or if it was actually like just their knowledge and stuff." So she was very present, she was always there for us, for the whole team. She would go to the math planning team's meetings every week whenever they met.

J: So then what kind of direct support did you receive from her? Or was it just the PLCs?

N: Yeah it was mostly just the PLCs. And if I, there were 2 or 3 instances where I didn't have enough manipulatives or I was needing some more resources for one of my small groups and stuff and she was able to provide it for me right away.

J: So then earlier I had you look through these 3 different models of effective instructional coaching and you said that your math curriculum specialist is more aligned to the "teacher-oriented" coaches that work with teachers in groups. So can you kind of expand on that, how you guys worked together in a group?

N: She would always focus on us as a whole first grade team. Because she is the important, like the specialist, for Pre-K through sixth, she's always running around back and forth but whenever she's with us, she would meet with us as a whole team because since we are all the first grade team and everybody who teaches math should be teaching the same TEKS the same week, and should be teaching it similar, you know. It was easier for her to discuss with us as a whole group. And she would get our input and I think it was easier for her to get our input as a whole 1st grade rather than just the 2 or 3 teaches who plan because she can speak on behalf of them but what

about the rest of us? So she would take her time to try to figure out what is that we needed, what is it that we wanted, how to fix it and basically just let us voice our opinions and she would accommodate based on that.

J: So then you guys as individuals and as an entire group felt that your voices were heard and acknowledged.

N: Yeah, definitely.

J: So then if she, if you find that she aligns with this model of instructional coaching, would you also say that she is effective in her role?

N: Yes.

J: Two more questions... so you are coming back to your campus this coming school year. So what factors led you to decide to stay there?

N: Um, our math specialist for sure because I knew we were already so strong in math in the sense that planning and resources for math, everything that we needed, but unfortunately she found a different school district over the summer that she went to. Um and also for our reading specialist, she was fairly new but she was trying her hardest and she was definitely trying her best. And we were also able, I found out over the summer too, that we got a new adoption of like a whole Pearson system so she is getting trained on that and the teachers have a training on that and it's an entire thing like textbooks, workbooks, they even have lesson plans in there for you so I feel more positive because that was something we didn't have last year. We didn't have a, like a base content, you know, something to build off of. This year we definitely do.

J: Would you say, like as a conclusion, that having direct support from these instructional specialists affected your decision to stay? And then can you kind of talk about them separately? How your relationship with the math specialist and the reading specialist affected your decision to return?

N: Um, I definitely think having a strong specialist in math, science, reading or anything makes a teacher want to come back because if you know that the specialists are there and they have their stuff together, that even if your kids are struggling in your class, you at least have the backing and the support and the resources to help them. But if the specialists are not up to par, per se, then it makes it harder for you to want to come back because of the fact that your kids are struggling and the person you're supposed to turn to is not there all the way to be able to provide you with the support, it makes it a lot harder to come back. So this year, like I said, I definitely was looking forward to coming back because of the math specialist and for the reading specialist, I think they do have an effect, especially in a school that the deficit is reading. Having someone for their reading specialist position I think is definitely something that would make me want to return and think that "Okay, you know, they have their stuff together so let me try to, you know, come back and kind of work together" because it was a lot last year so I kind of felt more comfortable this year because we already know who the person is going to be. It's not a new person and I figured over the summer, "Hey, she's going to get a lot more training" so she'll be ready. Which, as of this week, she has shown us like hey, she's been through a lot of training. She was a lot more confident.

J: So she had shown professional growth which makes you feel more comfortable about coming back to work with her?

N: Exactly.

J: Is there anything else you'd like me to know?

N: No, other than that, just that our, well in the meantime our reading specialist, the one who was hired to be reading specialist, as she was learning, since she was brand new, our superintendent's wife did an excellent job. She took it as like interim version of reading specialist. She's very experienced in like 1st grade, 2nd grade reading and writing. Her specialty is that she has tons and tons of resources and that really helped too. That was one of the reasons that I wanted to come back too because I mean, even though the other one, the new one was learning, we already had her and she's, she's just there. She's to use at our disposal in a sense. She's like "Take anything that you need from me. Ask me any question that you need. Take any help I can give." So that made it easy too.

J: So even though her title is not technically a curriculum specialist, that is the role that she has taken. Therefore, that still made an impact on your decision to return.

N: Yeah, because I'm willing to get help from anyone, even if you don't, even if it's other teachers who, "Hey, I've been doing this for 3 years and it worked for me." Okay, perfect. I'll try that out. Just because you have the name specialist doesn't only mean that I can't get help from anyone else.

J: Right.

N: Having a good specialist, it's definitely, it makes a huge impact on not only us but for the students also.

Appendix J

Transcript of Second Interview with Nicole Collins

J: Alright Nicole, thank you so much for returning my call. Before we start, can I confirm that you're participating in this interview out of your own free will?

N: Yes, I am.

J: Perfect. So I'm going to review the purpose of my study so that you remember why we're talking about curriculum specialists and instructional coaching and then we'll go ahead and move into the questions. So if you remember, the purpose of my study is to focus on first- and second-year teachers like yourself and see if having a quality and effective curriculum specialist made a difference in them deciding to remain at their campus for the next year. So last time we met, we talked about a lot of different things regarding the math specialist and the reading specialist, so we're going to continue that conversation now. So my first question is now that you're into the new school year, can you describe how your year is going so far?

N: It's going well with the students. I feel like I have a much better grasp on the students and how to teach compared to my last two years so it's been a lot smoother with the students. When it comes to like other stuff, like deadlines and last minute things getting sprung on us, that's always there but overall I think it's going pretty well and it's much, much better than the last two years that I've been at Star Elementary.

J: That's good, I'm glad to hear that because I know you mentioned quite a few struggles that you had with your first two years of teaching so that's good that this year is off to a better start. So when we spoke last time, you talked about several factors that kept you at your campus. You had also mentioned that you had interviewed to switch campuses in between your first and second year but then you decided to stay because the campuses you were interviewing at were very similar to where you were coming from, am I remembering that correctly?

N: Yeah, that's correct.

J: So the things that you said brought you back were your strong team, good co-workers that you got along with and were very close to and then your math specialist as well, because you're self-contained, your math specialist was also very strong and that was a reason that you were coming back. Have your feelings stayed the same regarding those factors?

N: So far, regarding my team, yes it has. When it comes to the specialists, I think we're still struggling and it's making a big impact on the way I'm feeling about our curriculum. We finally, after our old math specialist left, we just got a new math specialist last month and she's very new to, not only our district but I think she's new to the profession, so she's still kind of on her toes when it comes to what she has to give us and what resources. She's not very sure how to put things in her own hands so she's asking for a lot of it to be done through us. Like, "Okay, come tell me what you need," or "Tell me how many you need," or "What are you teaching now? How can I help?" So a lot of it is her getting familiar with us and getting familiar with what we're teaching. At the very beginning, she gave us a lot of different things we could do for stations with the kids and a lot of the stuff that was given was supposed to be a first grade level, but Southwest School District is different when it comes to the type of kids we have. A lot of our students are not on the first grade level, so a lot of the work she had given us, to her, should have been normal for first graders. For our kids, it was a lot more challenging because of their levels

that they were currently on. That's what has been going on. She's a nice lady and everything but I think it's so much newness that I think she feels overwhelmed and she's just unsure a lot of the time. In regards to our reading specialist, it's the person who I was telling you that they pulled her in the middle of the year last year. She was a former teacher and then they have her as a specialist now. In my personal opinion, I still think she has a long way to go before I feel comfortable with her being our specialist for reading, especially because we're a school that has a very, like, our reading scores are very low. That's the number one thing that we're struggling with as a whole campus. She's supposed to be the specialist for Pre-K through sixth. It seems like it's a lot of a challenge and there are things that teachers are wanting and we're needing and resources that we're asking for and we're just not getting it, to be honest.

J: Thank you for sharing that with me. So it sounds like things have stayed the same, except for the math specialist. So, also the last time we met, you described the culture as being a family feel, like everyone was in it together but you felt like your administrators were not very present and they were focused on fixing a lot of the issues that came up when you guys consolidated your two campuses. Do you find the culture to be the same this year or have you experienced a shift?

N: The beginning of the year, to be honest, it was going really well and we were doing all kinds of things like teacher bonding and relationships and things like that and, you know, administrators were included in it with the teachers and it was starting off to a really, really good start. You know, everything was good and it just seems like in the last month or two when it's like coming down to crunch time and when it comes to district assessments coming out and CBAs are out and all of that, it just seems like they're not... they're just going back to the same things as last year, basically. It's just a lot of things being thrown at teachers and a lot of, like, "Okay, here you go. Go figure it out." It's really stressful because there are a lot of things as a teacher, yes, we have to do, but there are a lot of things from the specialists that we're expecting them to be able to provide for us and we're not getting that. Also, as a specialist, I've heard from other people in other schools that their specialists come in, pull kids out, work with them, try to be hands on with the kids whereas our specialists are not. It's also because it's just the way the district runs, the specialists for us is the same specialist for Pre-K through sixth for all of reading. So I mean she's stretched thin as it is and it's the same thing for math. The math specialist is the specialist for Pre-K through sixth and they're stretched thin so they can't really dedicate their time to any of us, to be honest. I think there needs to be a change in that situation because it's really bad right now when it comes to the specialists and us wanting clarification or us wanting a pacing guide or us wanting to meet with them and have them give us some input when we are planning for reading or math. We're not getting that because they're not available or they don't know, or "I'll look into it and let you know," but we never get a response back.

J: That sounds really challenging.

N: Yes, very challenging.

J: So you really led in to my next question. I was going to ask if you could describe your relationship with your curriculum specialist this year. It sounds like you guys are struggling so what I heard you say is that you ask for things and you're not getting it in a timely manner or you're just not getting responses at all. You understand it's because they're spread thin; however, at the end of the day, that is still impacting you.

N: Exactly, yeah.

J: So my next question is how has your relationship with your curriculum specialist changed from last year to this year? Obviously I know the math specialist is new so that's a definite shift for you but can you touch on maybe how your relationship with the reading specialist has changed since it's the same person?

N: Um, it's changed in the sense of last year we were kind of like easier on her, you could say, because she was new to the whole job of being a specialist and, um, there was a lot of learning that she had to do so we kind of, like, gave her, like, the benefit of the doubt, I would say. We figured she was new and we could give her some time to get the hang of things. If she didn't know something, it was fine. But after being a specialist since January and then having the whole summer to do training and then having professional development time to learn stuff, at this point now, I've become a lot more vocal in a sense of, like, if I need something, I'm stepping up and just saying, "Hey, I need this and I need it now." Or "Hey, I don't have this and I've emailed you three or four times and I don't have it." Or "Can you figure out what's going on?" I've been a lot more direct this year and kind of expecting more out of her because she had a lot more time to get prepared and get her, you know, get her knowledge built on this actual career and so now I guess I've been more demanding in a sense, but not in a bad way. It's more of "These are the things I need and this is what I'm expecting." So I guess it's changed in the sense of me being a lot more, in her eyes, more needy this year. But it's just things that I never had before that I want now. There's so many out of a group of 21 kids that are on all kinds of different levels of reading and I don't have all the materials for every single kid individually, you know? So it's a big thing that I'm constantly bugging her about but I guess the relationship changed just because now I'm a lot more... I talk to her a lot more.

J: It sounds like you're more firm, like you're more firm in asking for what you need.

N: Yeah, exactly.

J: So then, touching on the same idea, do you feel supported by either of your curriculum specialists in terms of understanding the curriculum itself? Like, if you do need clarification on something, if you want someone to model a lesson, or you just need to have a better understanding of how to teach something, do you feel supported by either of your specialists in that?

N: Um, when it comes to the reading specialist, no, I don't feel supported by her because she herself has said that she's not familiar with our new textbook adoption. We're with Pearson now and there are a lot of new changes which we've never been with them before and the textbook adoption is awesome. They have 100 different resources that are really good for all different kinds of levels but there is so much going on that we kind of need her guidance to figure out what exactly is the main target and which things are not. So we haven't had that support from her. In regards to the math specialist, I know she has sat in on a few of the math planning sessions with the planning team and she's provided us with handouts, like different materials we can use in stations. When it comes to modeling lessons and stuff, she hasn't really done that but also, she's only been here a month now. I think that has something to do with the fact of her not really being in to model much to us. She's just kind of figuring out what level kids are on and kind of figuring out what grade levels need what and stuff so she hasn't really had time to, like, dive into modeling and providing instructional support yet.

J: Right. So for either of them, and you can focus on just one specialist if you want, like your reading specialist who has been there all year, do you feel like they do anything to regularly

support you in your instructional practices? Like, you can always count on the specialist to, you know, do something that helps you with your instruction, the actual classroom instruction?

N: Um, can you repeat the last part again?

J: Yeah, so the question is what does the curriculum specialist do regularly to support you in your instructional practices?

N: So regularly.

J: Yeah, something that is consistent, you can rely on them to always help you unit plan, or always help you create assessments, or anything like that.

N: Let me think really hard on that one... um, because, I mean, she... the one thing I guess she regularly does is she does ask us every time we do see her, like, you know, what materials we need, what resources we need. So she is, when we do get with her when she is available to come to our PLCs or our planning periods and stuff, she does ask what resources we need so she kind of keeps checking on us. Like she tries to figure out what we need. A lot of it, I don't know if it's because she doesn't have access to get those resources for us or if it's just that... I don't know where the miscommunication is. If she's not telling administrators what we need or if she knows what we need but she's just not able to get it yet, or what the issue is in that regard. I'm not sure but she is good at regularly checking up and seeing what things we need, basically.

J: Okay. So, again, when we met previously, you described your math curriculum specialist as following a certain coaching model. I believe the one that you picked was the teacher in a group model where you meet with the teachers all at once and it's a lot of professional development, curriculum focus and things like that, like looking at assessment data. So how does this model that your curriculum specialist aligns with... but you know what? Now you have a different curriculum specialist. So I guess if your math or reading specialist were to still follow that model, again, where you guys are working in a group of teachers and looking at curriculum, assessments, lesson plans, how would that affect your decision to remain on your campus? So I guess the question is really, is that a model that you think is impactful and would that motivate you to stay or do you have negative opinions about it?

N: Um, I think if they were to implement that, where they're coming in and they're sitting in on our planning sessions and they're talking to us and going over data and they're describing, "Okay, you know, these students did this well on this test so let's not focus on that anymore. Let's focus on the ones, you know, the TEKS that the kid didn't master," and things like that. If we were to have those kinds of one-on-one discussions and kind of help us get our lesson plans in a more, like, targeted way, not just a broad way, I think that would really help. I think it would impact me to want to stay but if it's going the way it's currently going, to be honest, it would impact me to definitely want to leave. A lot of good support and the help that we are looking for, we're not getting. So that's just, you know, that's the frustrating portion of it so I think if they were to spend more one-on-one time with us and try to help us out and plan with us and help us with our data and just help us with strategies, I think that would definitely make me want to stay. But currently, unfortunately, it's not going that way. That's an issue we're facing.

J: So it sounds like you're looking for a coaching model that would impact the growth of your students, like make you more effective as a teacher in the classroom which would then, in turn, increase your student achievement.

N: Yes, ma'am, exactly.

J: So if you were to compare your curriculum specialist, we can talk about both of them... so if you were to compare your curriculum specialist to one of these proven effective models that I had shared with you, and they were deemed to not be effective... so let's say they were being evaluated by the principal and the principal said neither of them were effective in this role... would that affect the impact you feel they have on you professionally?

N: Yeah, I think it would affect me if the principal was to say "You guys are not being effective in your teaching model." If they were told there needed to make a change or needed to do a different coaching method because it's not working for the teachers and not working for the students, then I think that would help us a lot more because then maybe she would finally see what we're kind of seeing. I don't know if that would prompt the principal to try to get them those trainings to help them or to replace them and find people who are already trained and certified with experience in this. I think that would put a lot of ease on us to know that the principal sees what we're seeing and what we're lacking and what they're missing out on. So what is she going to do to replace them so that someone can help us? Does that make sense?

J: I understand what you're saying. So kind of aligned to that coaching model, have you seen your curriculum specialists follow a coaching cycle? A coaching cycle is certain steps that you repeat. For example, you guys could start with planning an entire unit. Then you could focus on the individual lessons, then you create an assessment, then you analyze the data and after that, you can start all over again. Do either of your specialists follow a coaching cycle like that?

N: Um, I can't really speak on the math one just because she's, like I said before, she's very new and she hasn't had much time to be with us. But with the reading specialist, I think she follows a coaching method but I don't think it's a full, like a full method if that makes sense. She follows portions of it so a lot of the planning and, like, unit planning is definitely done by our reading teachers, like the three teachers who are on the first grade team for the reading planning. When it comes to individual lessons, it's also done by the reading teachers, the reading planning team. But when it comes to creating the assessments for the unit assessments, that is done by her. For the last two, like, she did the first unit and now she's preparing the second unit assessment for like the end of the six weeks. When it comes to the planning portion of it, it's done directly by the reading teachers. I wouldn't necessarily say she follows a full coaching method but she does portions of it.

J: So do you feel like that affects your capacity as a teacher? Like you might be more successful if she were to follow an entire coaching cycle or it doesn't impact you at all?

N: Yes, it most definitely does impact us as teachers because it's very difficult when we don't have the, you know, the individualized attention. When we're only getting a piece of her to do like a little bit and then she's not doing the rest and the rest is put on us, and then we're waiting and it's just a big old... it becomes very hard to keep up and teach. Especially, because like I said before, our lowest point is reading and so our main push as a teacher is how to fill the gaps to get the kids to be reading on level and without the proper resources and tools and if she was following a coaching method, then it would also kind of put us on a schedule where we know every week at this time we meet with her. We would know what we needed to prepare, what we needed, instead of us just being in the dark and shooting to see what we can get done. I think it would make an impact on me as a teacher if we had a better system put in place and it would really help me feel comfortable. It would help me be able to have the resources ahead of time

because it's hard to find 20 different resources for 20 different kids reading on 20 different levels.

J: I understand that. So then, do you think that that lack of a full coaching cycle would impact your decision to remain at your campus?

N: Yes, definitely, I think so, yeah, because especially at a campus like ours where reading is the main focus. If we don't have the true... if we don't have somebody with the true ability for a specialist and they don't have a curriculum background, it makes it very hard for us to have that, you know, the drive to push the kids even more. Even just for us to be able to say, like, I have the proper tools and know what I have to do now. Every kid is different and even kids who read on the same level, they might need two totally different strategies to read. I know there is a lot as a teacher independently you can go find and figure out but if there's someone who is knowledgeable and skilled in the situation who knows this information, it makes it a lot easier because they have more to offer and they have a bigger toolbox than I do as a teacher who has only been teaching for basically two years.

J: Right. That makes complete sense. If someone is an expert in their field, then you would benefit from them sharing what they know.

N: Exactly.

J: So I only have one more question for you. What matters more to you as a teacher - the relationship you have with your curriculum specialists or their level of effectiveness? So someone can be effective but you don't get along with them very well or you can get along with them well but they're not very effective in their job. What would be more important to you?

N: I think, especially for a reading specialist, the relationship is not as important as how effective they are. At the end of the day, even if I don't like you, if you know your stuff and you're on top of it and you can help me, that is going to help my kids. But I could be your best friend all day but if you have no clue what you're doing, that doesn't help my kids at all. At the end of the day, we're only teaching so that we can improve the lives of these kids and have them reading and be able to move on up in life. I think a specialist needs to be effective because you're not just touching one kid's life, you're having to change a whole grade or a whole school so you have to be able to keep up with that and I think effectiveness is way more important than a relationship, personal relationship.

J: Alright, well those are all the questions that I have for you. Do you have anything else that you think I would need to know or would be relevant for me to know? Is there anything else you would like to share?

N: No, I think that's pretty much it. I don't want it to sound like I was bashing her or anything but it's just, she's a nice lady and everything but at the end of the day, like I just said, I'm not here for relationships with other teachers. That's not going to help... relationships are important, yeah, but I'm not here to be best friends with people. I'm here to help these kids, especially at a school like ours and I just want my kids to be able to be reading on level and have them have the strategies and I can try as much as I can but I want somebody supportive. Especially somebody who is getting paid a lot of money and somebody who does have that title that we're just expecting them to have that kind of knowledge and that background. For them to not have it, it's just really disappointing. It hurts because of the fact that if it was science or social studies or something, I wouldn't be complaining as much but when it's reading, reading is our biggest deficit and that's where I'm pushing my kids to try to fill that gap and that's the hardest thing. I

just want a good reading specialist. It's not just me, it's everyone across the board. That's where I think our struggle is and I think we're going to continue to struggle unless we can figure out a solution for this. That's the biggest issue we're having right now.

J: So you guys just need targeted support in order to improve those areas of need? That makes sense.

N: Exactly. And we have a lot of areas of need and it's not just reading for first grade, it's every grade. It's going to get worse and worse if we're not helping the kids this year and they just somehow move on to second grade. So then that means second grade has an issue and then third grade has an issue and it's just going up the ladder but it's not getting fixed. That's the biggest, biggest concern that I have.

J: That's understandable.

N: That's all that I have to say, pretty much. Nothing else. I'm hoping it gets better and maybe if she gets some more training or maybe if they are able to hire another curriculum specialist to be, like, partnered with her, I think that would be helpful too because, as I said, she is spread thin and it's a lot for one person. There are only five days in a week so I think maybe they need one or two more people. They need to invest some money into that to really help us, I think.

Appendix K

Transcript of First Interview with Allison Davis

J: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we begin, can I confirm your consent to participate in this research study of your own free will?

A: Yes, you can.

J: Great, and can you just state your name for the recording?

A: Allison Davis.

J: Thank you. Okay, tell me how long you've been in education.

A: I just completed my first year of teaching so I'm going into my second year.

J: Did you teach the same last year as you are this year?

A: Yes.

J: Which is...?

A: 3rd grade math and science.

J: Perfect. So, well I guess that leads me to my next question - what is your current role? Do you take on any additional responsibilities like anything, any other kind of leadership opportunities within the school?

A: No, not specifically but we do alternate our lesson planning so there are times when I would have to do the planning all by myself so I would be the designated leader of that unit and plan.

J: For both math and science?

A: Right.

J: Okay so there's like a rotation?

A: Yes.

J: How many people are on your team?

A: Six.

J: Is that total?

A: For math and science.

J: Oh there's six math and science teachers?

A: Yes.

J: That's a good amount to share the responsibility. Okay, what led you to choosing a career in education?

A: Growing up, my father was a teacher so he inspired me so just seeing him, you know, working and interacting with his students, that kind of inspired me. And also, I was a little bossy when I was younger so, you know, whenever we played school with my friends, I always had to be the teacher. So I always have had a passion for children and working in my church with different kids, I decided to go ahead and go into education because I have a passion for children.

J: That's awesome. Did you do anything before that?

A: I worked in corporate America.

J: So that's quite a shift.

A: Yes, it is. A desk job.

J: Do you feel like...

A: But my degree is in education. It just took me a while to pass my certification exam.

J: They're hard.

A: So I had to get a job where I could and finally I passed my tests and was able to get into the classroom where I really wanted to be.

J: So how would you characterize the level of administrative support you received in the 2018-2019 school year? So focusing on last school year, which was your first full year, you said, correct?

A: Yes.

J: So how would you characterize the level of administrative support for your assistant principal, principal? Did you feel that they were present? Did you feel they were supportive? Did they get to know you? Did they know what was going on in your classroom? How would you describe their level of support the past school year?

A: I feel like the administrative team was very, very supportive to me because it was my first year and they had an open door policy so if there was anything I needed I can, you know, I was able to go directly to them. I didn't have to, you know, talk to an assistant before getting to them. They have an open door policy, you see them frequently in the hallways, they don't mind you stopping, asking them questions. I feel like they were very supportive. They're very supportive to this day in my second year.

J: That's good.

A: I like them a lot.

J: So did you feel like you had support both on the curriculum side and the classroom management/behavior side?

A: I do. There was a situation that I had with one of my students and, um, I really like to try to handle things in my classroom on my own but this situation kind of escalated to where I was forced to have to get administration involved and they came right to my room as soon as I called them. So they addressed it right then and there, removed the student from the classroom so I didn't have to wait, you know, to handle the situation myself. They came in and removed the student from my classroom. So I've only had one encounter like that but it I can attest to that.

J: And it was a positive one.

A: Yes. They came directly to my room and supported me in that situation.

J: That's great because that's not always the case. So how would you describe the professional development you received in the 2018-2019 school year in terms of preparing you to teach... well, I guess that twofold. In terms of preparing you to teach your content as well as preparing you to manage a classroom. And this could be provided by the district or the campus or both, just whatever kind of development you received.

A: So starting out as a first year teacher, I will say that it was a little overwhelming because I was trying to find my niche and figure out what worked for me but the school is so big and it really has a mentality of like a private school where we're all kind of like family. So the good thing about it is that I have a really, really good team. I have a really, really good partner and um they were really, really helpful. So as far as the professional development, they had a specific training for new teachers and new teachers to the campus.

J: Was that like an orientation?

A: No, it was more of an actual training with classroom management tips, time management tips. You know, just specifically geared towards new teachers. Because we had to come back before the rest of the teachers so I think that that was very, very helpful with the professional development with those skills and strategies that they shared with us, ahead of time before the

rest of the teachers came back. And I will say that it was a very positive experience. My first year of teaching was amazing.

J: That's great.

A: Like, I don't have any really horrible things to say because I had people that took care of me.

J: So what I hear you say is that your team had a big impact on you. You said you had a strong team, you had a great partner, so they probably, I'm assuming they helped you along the way so even if you were not to have had this initial new teacher training, your team was such a positive space to be in that you would have been successful regardless.

A: And they've had years of experience so they had already been doing things so what they did was just tell me, "Okay, this is what we do. You can make it your own." or "Do it this way or choose not to do it this way." So I really had everything laid out for me.

J: That's nice, that's nice. That takes out a lot of the work of the trial and error, let me see what works for me without that background knowledge.

A: Yes. And with that, I was able to actually work with my students even more because I didn't have to really worry so much on what lesson am I going to do this day? I could go in, you know I would still have to go in and change it with however the different types of learners I have in my classroom but that, them being there to have the foundation laid out for me, I guess, I don't know if that's the right words to say, but having it, you know, laid out already for me was very, very helpful because I was able to spend time on different areas like with my lower kiddos.

J: Well you got to focus on what matters because those other, maybe more tedious tasks were already taken care of. That's nice, that's great for a first year teacher, especially. So did you happen to participate in an induction program provided by your campus or district? Kind of like, "you're new here, we're going to take you in" and it's a set program that follows you throughout the year. They're not always common so it's okay if it's no.

A: Well we can do like a mentor/mentee program. What do you think about that?

J: Okay so that's my next question so let's get the induction program and tell me about the mentoring program that was provided by your campus or district in the 2018-2019 school year.

A: Okay so my mentor was also my teammate. It kind of worked out really, really well. She had been teaching for six years.

J: That's a good time. Math/science teammate or ELAR?

A: Math/science teammate. Yeah we worked more so with our content team because the only time you really worked with the other ELA is if it's your partner. So me and my partner had a good relationship but my mentor was my teammate also so she, you know, took the time out to check on me daily. She came and observed me to see if there was anything I needed help with. She would allow me to come and observe her. We just had to get it approved by administration but, you know, they had no issue with it and finding coverage for my class at the time.

J: So I want to make sure that I've got all of this down. So you guys actually observed each other so she would observe you and provide feedback? You would observe her and ask questions, get ideas?

A: Yes, get ideas.

J: And then you said she would check on you daily like "How is it going, are you doing okay?" Just an informal conversation. That's nice. I want to know more about you getting coverage to go observe each other because I've found, in my own personal experiences, that that's hard. It's

hard to get that coverage to go observe other teachers but a lot of times that's when you learn the most.

A: Right, right.

J: So if you could tell me more about that. Like, who came to cover your class? Was it the AP or principal who you had to check with? Or was it either one? I want to know more about those procedures.

A: So there's a form that you fill out to give the administration team advance notice when you schedule it with your mentor or your mentee. I would, during our planning, if I felt like I needed more clarification or if I wanted to go and see how my mentor did this with her class, you know, I would say okay. And really just like a week or a few days' notice, you know, we didn't really have to turn it in like a month in advance or anything like that. So they were really quick with the turnaround so we just let the administration know that this is what we're trying to do for our mentor/mentee relationship and they scheduled either a district aide. Uh, if the administrators were available but that didn't really happen but I'm pretty sure that they wouldn't have an issue, you know, covering. Our math specialist would step in and come in and teach, you know, if I didn't want my kids to lose instruction time from their teacher. The math specialist was open to coming in and teaching my class at that time for me to go and observe my mentor.

J: So the flexibility that you got with this mentoring program, is that a reason why you feel like your administrators were so supportive last year? Is that part of it?

A: It is, it definitely contributes to that.

J: So with the mentoring program, was it an informal relationship, like, "Ms. Davis, this is going to be your mentor. You guys work together throughout the school year." Or was it like "Here is something provided by the district, you need to check in on those forms and turn them into these people?"

A: They gave us all a binder where we would have to fill in the times that we met, what we talked about, um, a schedule, suggestions of "Okay, would you be interested in going to observe your mentor or your mentee..." things like that. That was actually a requirement as well, just once in the semester so it wasn't frequent but I also like the flexibility that I was able to go in and observe her.

J: Do you know if that was a campus program or a district program?

A: It was a district program, it was a district program.

J: Okay, so can you provide me a general description of your students' academic performance throughout the 2018-2019 school year?

A: So I will attest to their STAAR scores.

J: Okay.

A: My students were in the meets and approaches standards. I have one student that scored a perfect score on the STAAR test.

J: Wow!

A: So as a whole, I scored in the 85 percent.

J: That's fantastic.

A: And I'm really excited about that because they say that's kind of hard for first year teachers but I am really excited that I was able to do that.

J: You should be very proud of your hard work.

A: So this year I'm striving for the 90th percentile. [laughs]

J: Yes, that's a huge accomplishment, that's not easy. That's great! So then, throughout the year, did they perform throughout that same level? Like you had a medium to high class overall, not too many struggling learners, would you say?

A: So my student who scored 100%, she definitely had been performing well throughout the whole year but, um, for the bulk of them, it was definitely a growth period.

J: That's great!

A: So they, in the beginning, they were...[laughs], I had my work cut out for me. You know, but just realizing that, and knowing that I had a goal that I really wanted my students to be successful, um, I didn't eat lunch some days. My planning periods, I kept my low kids in here with me, you know, I talked to parents and told them what they needed to do at home.

J: Right. So you did the work?

A: I did the work. I did a lot of work!

J: So can you also talk to me, just to maybe paint a fuller picture, can you talk to me about the different groups of students that you had? Like the demographic breakdown or the different subgroups like did you have any kids who were in special education? Any kids who were English language learners? GT? Anything like that? Like their socioeconomic status?

A: I didn't have any GT students but the bulk of them were Hispanic students, um, ELLs. I had the bilingual students so they come in really, really low but it just, if you do the work, it'll pay off.

J: Did you get support through any aides or paraprofessionals who would come in and assist you with certain groups of students?

A: I did, I did have an aide, a bilingual aide that came in and worked with some of the students in that class, the bilingual class. One is not as bilingual.

J: Not as heavy with that population?

A: I have two classes so one is more English dominant and one is more Spanish dominant.

J: So in that class that had more of the Spanish speakers, that's where your bilingual aide came in?

A: Yes.

J: So moving on, can you describe your level of satisfaction with your teacher for the 2018-2019 school year?

A: Hm... that's a hard question.

J: Every time!

A: I am not satisfied [laughs].

J: I imagine coming from, like you said earlier, you came from corporate America so you can see that there is definitely a discrepancy for individuals who are highly trained. So tell me more about that.

A: I just think that, and this is really a personal opinion, I think that teachers are underpaid, very much so, because we work a lot. We work a lot, I just told you that I don't eat some days, you know, I spend my money on buying different manipulatives for my students, you know, just different rewards and treats because they are driven by prizes.

J: Yes, yes.

A: And I wanted great results so you know, [sighs] I just think that teachers in general are overworked and underpaid, so I'm not really satisfied with the salary. I think that we should be paid more because of all of the work that we do and I don't think that people really understand.

J: I agree, people outside of the profession, it's hard for them to understand what we do in a day.

A: They don't understand.

J: Has salary maybe driven you to look at other districts to see what the pay is outside of your district?

A: Just researching, yes, and this is one of the lowest paying districts but I like the flexibility. I like the laid back-ness of it. I like that I can come to school on a Saturday.

J: Yes, to get work some done. So there are still positive aspects of the district that are keeping you here even though you think the salary does not reflect the work that's put in.

A: Correct.

J: How would you describe the overall culture and climate at your campus in the 2018-2019 school year?

A: Um, the overall culture is, I think that we all want to strive for excellence. Um, it might be a little hard if you don't have the support.

J: Do you, just in your opinion, because I know that you can only speak from your 3rd grade math/science perspective, but in your opinion do you think different grade levels, different content areas, different teachers, receive different levels of support? So maybe some struggle if they don't receive the same support that you felt you received?

A: I don't know really because I hadn't heard anything like that, you know? I can really only talk about me and my experiences because nobody is really open to say "Well, they didn't really support me this week." You know, I like that about this campus also. We try to all be positive so you don't really hear much negativity which is really odd because, you know, that's just kind of common with people in general, you know, but they really strive and really say "Let's be positive, positive, positive, no negativity in the workplace." So I don't know if I don't have a close relationship with enough people to tell me negative stuff or what but...

J: I would think that you're lucky to not hear the negative.

A: I'm in here with my kids, I close my door, you know? If you're not coming in here to take care of some business, then I don't have time.

J: And I really appreciate that outlook, because then... and taking from what you're saying, the culture and climate as far as your experience has been, is it's positive? Everybody wants to succeed, everybody wants to do well and if there's any, if there are any feelings that are the opposite of that on the campus, you're not aware because you don't engage in those conversations?

A: I don't engage, I don't have time, I'm not interested. How can we make the students better? How can we make this a better situation?

J: So then I would imagine you contribute to a positive climate?

A: Definitely! I do. [laughs]

J: Because you're here and you're working for the kids and you're focusing on what matters.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

J: And I also imagine that if you did not have, maybe going into your second year, if you don't have the same level of support that you did last year because they, you know, your administrators feel more comfortable with your capabilities, you would still be just as positive.

A: Definitely.

J: So let's go to focusing on your curriculum specialist. So because you teach math and science, you work with the math curriculum specialist, correct?

A: Yes.

J: So can you describe your professional relationship with your campus' curriculum specialist?

A: She was, because she's not here anymore...

J: So she was here for last school year but she is not returning for this school year?

A: Yeah, she went back into the classroom.

J: Really?

A: Yes, she went back into the classroom so right now we don't have a math specialist but when she was here, she was absolutely amazing. If I had any questions, if I didn't understand what this TEKS meant, she knew it. She didn't have to go pull out a book, she didn't... she knew it. I can still call her and to this day, and say "Okay, what is this TEKS asking in depth? You know, what does this mean? What type of rigor should I be seeing with my students?" If I have any questions, I can call her now, I could call her back then, I could call her on the phone in her office, she'd come right down. She came in and modeled a lesson for me, um, she's amazing.

J: Well, so what I hear you saying is that it makes a difference having a curriculum specialist?

A: I think so! I think so because it's another level of support. It helps you to stay on track when you miss something, you know how if you type up a letter, you want somebody to overlook it to make sure that there's something that you don't miss? So she was definitely a big, big support for the whole math and science team.

J: That's great. So she came and modeled lessons, and it sounds like she was very open to questions and she wanted to help? So she was very present for you and then she was also knowledgeable.

A: Definitely.

J: So if you were to ask a question and she didn't know, did that happen?

A: That did not happen! [laughs] And I mean, if you see anybody, they will say she knows her stuff. She knows her stuff, there has never been a time where we've asked her a question and she didn't know the answer.

J: Wow, that's good.

A: I know, she was like the perfect angel!

J: And now she's gone. [laughs]

A: And now she's gone, we're all devastated!

J: So then if I ask if you received direct instructional support from your curriculum specialist, you touched on, you know, you asked her questions, she was knowledgeable, she modeled lessons. So did y'all meet together during weekly planning meetings or PLCs? Can you talk about that, like any regular support, if you could say it was weekly, every other week, anything like that?

A: So in the beginning, it... we planned two weeks in advance. So in the beginning, when we were doing our planning, um, she would be there with us. After school we'd plan on a Monday. On Mondays after school...

J: Every week?

A: No, when we first started out it was maybe twice a six weeks, twice every six weeks. And then as we got closer to the STAAR, we started really meeting weekly. And also, our school put in place extra planning time during the day. They got with the LAMP teachers, the ancillary teachers...

J: So like your PE, music... etc.?

A: ...to work out a schedule so we could develop a plan and they put this in place for us to do a ninety-minute PLC and we were able to discuss the data of different units and they gave us extra time to plan so we also had that additional time to work with the specialist and she was there for all of those meetings.

J: So your ninety-minute PLC... did you take your original planning time and extend it to make it ninety minutes?

A: Yes, that's what they did.

J: So then the whole school's master schedule was adjusted?

A: Not the whole school, just 3rd and 4th grade because we were getting ready for the STAAR test.

J: Because y'all just go to 4th, there is no 5th?

A: Right.

J: Okay, so I have three definitions here for different models of instructional coaching that are proven to be effective. So I apologize for the wordiness, but if you could read through these two models on the front and this one on the back and find the instructional coaching model that your math specialist was most closely aligned to in the previous year. I'll let you go ahead and read over that, no rush.

A: I'm torn between three and one.

J: Okay, well tell me what pieces of both fit your math specialist from last year. That's fine.

A: Okay so for model one, I will say the pieces are... really the main thing here is that it was the group.

J: Okay, so that's the teacher oriented coaching in a group.

A: Yes, all of the whole team. And for this one, model three, it is basically saying how she's an accountability partner for each teacher and that goes back to the group. She's basically being the accountability partner for how the teachers and the students, um, what's the word? How they learn, how we teach, how everything, how the whole classroom flows and I also liked the part on here where she said the coach examines the students' learning.

J: So not just focusing on the teachers, but also focusing on, "This is how I work with the teachers. How does it affect students and how are they progressing?"

A: Right, right, right. And, you know, if a student... the kids would take a unit test, we would sit down and talk about, "What do you think went wrong? What do you think went right?" Um, just letting the teachers go around and say, "Okay, well this is a strategy that I used that worked for this student. I have a student that couldn't grasp it so this is something that I did to help that student and they finally got it." So the math specialist was there to facilitate, you know, that whole conversation in our group.

J: So you just demonstrated how she did those two models together because you were all in a group setting, which is that teacher oriented coaching in a group, plus then she's analyzing the student work and that inquiry model where I'm asking you questions as a facilitator, not as an active participant. Like guiding you guys to have the conversation. So then based on those provided examples, would you characterize your math specialist as effective?

A: Very effective. Super effective! 100% effective!

J: So I know you already said that she had chosen another opportunity for this school year but I want to ask you about your decision to remain at this campus for this school year. So what factors led you to decide to stay here? Like what made you come back?

A: Okay, so let me just flat out say that I had an amazing first year of teaching and you know, just reading and research and I've heard so many horror stories about people having their first year teacher...first year of teaching be absolutely dreadful and because I've had so much great support from pretty much everyone, um, that determined that I wanted to come back and I really don't... I really don't think that I'm interested in leaving unless I start a family and have a whole bunch of more kids. [laughs] Then I'll need more money but that will be the only reason why I would leave is to get more money.

J: So if everything else stays the same - your strong team, your strong partner, a strong specialist, administrators that are supportive, a good group of students who you're able to see growth in... if all of that were to stay the same, the only thing that would be a factor in you leaving is the pay?

A: Some personal reason.

J: So not professional?

A: If I have more children and would need to make different choices financially. [laughs]

J: I understand that!

A: Because the benefits are expensive here also so it's all personal for a reason why I would leave.

J: So then my final question for you is did having direct support from your math specialist affect your decision to stay here at your elementary school?

A: It definitely did. I cried like a baby when our specialist told us that she was leaving. It really, really broke my heart [laughs] because she was really, really great, you know, and good help is hard to find. I've learned that throughout life - good help is really, really hard to find and she was there to support us, the whole team, not just one person. Probably me because I needed the most support but, yeah, she definitely played a big role in me returning. I couldn't go where she went because she's too far away so... but it was definitely effective.

J: So then, kind of closing out our conversation, is there anything else you'd like me to know about your specialist, how you guys worked together, just any last ideas that you haven't mentioned yet?

A: Um, I don't know but I mean I would definitely say it's important to have one because you need support...

J: Guidance.

A: ...guidance, you need support, you need an accountability partner, you need someone in your corner. You need someone to tell you if you're messing up or if you're doing a good job. You need someone and I think that our math specialist/instructional coach was that. She was just that.

J: Well thank you very much for meeting with me.

A: Thank you!

Appendix L

Transcript of Second Interview with Allison Davis

J: Okay, hi Allison, how are you?

A: I'm doing good, how are you?

J: Good, thank you. So thank you for agreeing to meet with me a second time. Before we start, I do have some questions for you today but, like I said, before we start I want to go ahead and go over what this study is about just to refresh your memory. So, my study focuses on interviewing first- and second- year teachers, yourself included, to see how your decision to stay at your campus was impacted by working with an instructional coach, or at your campus, you guys call them curriculum specialists. So, I just have a few questions for you today. If you're ready, can you just go ahead and confirm that you are participating in this study of your own free will?

A: Yes, I am.

J: Perfect. Alright, so now that you're into the new school year, can you describe how your year is going so far?

A: So far my year is going very well.

J: Good. Can you tell me what makes you say that? Is it your group of students, do you guys have a new math specialist? I know your other one left. What are some changes?

A: Yes, we do have a new math specialist who has been with us for a few weeks now. I do have a new group of students so it's been interesting and fun.

J: Good! So you're having a good time so far?

A: Yes, everything is going good so far.

J: Good. So last time we met, we discussed several factors that kept you at your campus and you mentioned that there were a lot of things that brought you back. You said your first year was just amazing compared to other stories you had heard. Your first year was like an anomaly, basically. You had a great group of students. They performed really well on the STAAR. You got along really well with your team, your partner, your math specialist. So have your feelings regarding those factors stayed the same?

A: Yes, my feelings have stayed the same. Um, we do have a new math specialist. She has been, um, amazing as well so I'm happy about that. You know, meeting someone new that you'll be working so closely with, that can be a challenge sometimes but she has, you know, proven to be awesome. So I'm super excited about that. The administration has still been, you know, very supportive and everything is still the same.

J: That's great, I'm really glad to hear that because I know you were very happy when we last spoke so I'm glad that you're experiencing the same thing. That's great to hear. So, again, last time we met, you described the culture as being very positive from your point of view. I remember you saying that you didn't have time for anything than positivity, that you were focused on growing your kids and if someone did not share that same focus, then you were not interested in engaging in any other conversations.

A: That's correct.

J: So from your perspective now with this new school year and some new people in the building, how do you find the culture to be? Do you think it's the same, has it shifted? Describe your campus climate for me.

A: Um, I would say that it has shifted a little bit but in a more positive way. It feels more like a family this year. Um, last year, you know, you had some people who were not as positive as, you know, you would want them to be. So this year it seems like we have a lot of new people that are on board with the same goals, you know. They're doing what's best for children and even though people have their own thoughts about policies and stuff, we say, "Okay, let's work together for the kids." So we share what we did that worked and it just seems more like a family this year.

J: Good, so you guys, it sounds like you're able to collaborate a lot with your peers and you guys are all there for the same purpose, which is educating children.

A: Yes, it's awesome. That's exactly correct.

J: Good. So now that you have a new curriculum specialist, can you describe your relationship with them? Maybe what things they do to support you and how often you guys interact? I know you already said that they're great but if you could expand on that a little bit?

A: So she's new, so we haven't really gotten a chance to spend a lot of time together but we meet to plan once a week and those planning meetings, she's been there for most of them and she has started off with creating some stations for us to use, for us to look at and decide if we want to include that in our classroom. She has brought lots of ideas to us for different stations, workstation ideas. So that has been something that she has contributed to the team and, um, she came around and asked if there was anything I needed help with so, even though she hasn't been there that long, she has really shown her face and has been supportive and let us know that she is there, you know, we're all working together.

J: Right, I'm happy to hear that. So then, my next question is how has your relationship with your curriculum specialist changed from last year to this year? I know you already explained a lot of that. Can you talk about how you as a teacher, maybe last year, if you used to run every mini-lesson idea by your specialist? Maybe now you have to do something different? Can you just talk about how that affects your decision making as a teacher and what you do differently now with a different specialist?

A: So I can, I'll just be truthful, and say that I haven't run anything by her first. But there was a test that she created and, you know, as a team we spoke to her and told her that one of the questions was not as rigorous as we liked it to be. So, um, we did bring that to her attention but of course, you know, we don't want to step on anyone's toes because that's not really our job, it's her job. But we still are open to that positive, constructive criticism that, you know, we gave her our feedback and told her our thoughts so she was open to receiving that. So, um, as far as my mini-lessons, I haven't had a chance to run anything by her first. We plan collectively as a team so she already knew what we were doing so I haven't deviated, really, from the lesson plan that we planned together as a team other than, you know, things that I do that in my small group instruction. But, as far as that, I haven't given her a chance. Before, last year, I would want my math specialist's opinion. But I haven't gained that relationship with her just yet, the new curriculum specialist. So I'm kind of, like, well let me be respectful of her. She's learning everybody and figuring things out in this new district, so, um, that's just where we are now.

J: And there's nothing wrong with that, but that just shows you've had to adjust your practices as an educator because someone new is in that role. I like how you mentioned that you and your team have really taken it on and you guys are operating as a collaborative team. Even though you might not be running everything by your specialist, you guys are working as a team and you guys are on the same page.

A: Yes, very much so.

J: So then, do you feel like you are supported by your curriculum specialist in terms of understanding the curriculum? If you need any clarification on TEKS that are to be taught or understanding the best way to teach something, do you feel supported that way?

A: I do, because although she hasn't been there a long time, she let us know verbally that she's there if we need her. You know, don't hesitate to reach out to her for support.

J: Is this your old specialist that you're talking about?

A: No, this is the new specialist. Sorry, I must have misunderstood the question.

J: No, that's the question but I asked but it sounded like something you had mentioned about your old specialist, that she was always there and open to questions so that's good that your new one is like that as well.

A: Yes, but I'm just saying I don't know because she's still new but she did come around to each one of us on the team to tell us verbally that if we needed something, we could feel free to come to her and talk to her.

J: That's good. So then, I guess I've already asked this question, or we've already discussed your response to this. My next question is what does the curriculum specialist do regularly to help support you in your instructional practices? You said that she has attended your planning meetings. Is there anything that she does outside of that, like modeling lessons or providing resources?

A: She has provided resources for us. She gave us some electronic resources that we can, you know, use in the classroom. She has not come to model a lesson in my classroom per se, but she has gone around to other different teachers in the classroom. She hasn't come to mine so I'm not sure if she's giving feedback on what she observes but, um, I heard that she was going around and observing certain teachers and also she created a, something like a checkpoint. Remember I said she created a test for us? So something like a checkpoint that we're now going to be doing in our, um, with our curriculum. And take those on Fridays, so that we can, uh, you know, just make sure the students are ready and prepared for the STAAR test.

J: So it sounds like she's doing what she can do right now with being new.

A: Yes.

J: So when we met previously, you described your curriculum specialist as following two different models. One was a group model where they do the instructional coaching with all the teachers in a group and the other model was the cognitive inquiry where you guys are analyzing data, looking at curriculum and then making decisions based off of that. From what you have seen so far, do you think that your new curriculum specialist is operating under the same models?

A: Um, I'm just going to say from what I've seen, she has been open to sharing and talking to the group because she has been in our planning meetings.

J: Okay. So then she is following one of those models, is what you're seeing so far?

A: Right, the first model.

J: So then, do you think... so let's just talk about that first model then. So if she continues to follow that first model, would that affect your decision to remain on your campus? Like is that a model that you find very effective and you love it so much that, because she operates using that model, you would want to stay at your campus? Would that be motivation for you?

A: That's a hard question [laughs]. That's a hard question because that is not... that would be one of the reasons why I would stay, if that makes sense.

J: Yes. So maybe not the most important reason, because that model is all about teachers working as a group, you're receiving professional development, you're planning curriculum. So that would be one reason, but maybe not the most important? Is that how you feel about it?

A: Right, because me as a new teacher, I'm still trying to find my way so I like the group thing versus individual, you have to figure things out on your own. I love the group planning because it helps me, you know, realize some things. You know, I'm still trying to learn all the TEKS and, you know what I mean? So I like the group planning. So it is definitely a nice factor but it's not the most important thing that will make me stay at this school.

J: Right. So then if you were to compare your curriculum specialist, and we're still talking about the new one, if we were to compare your specialist to one of those proven effective models that I had showed you... so let's compare her to the first one that's the teacher coaching in a group. If we were to compare her to that model and an evaluator were to say, "I see how she's trying to do this model, but I do not believe her to be effective in her job." Would that impact the way you feel about her professionally? If an evaluator were to say, "This is not an effective curriculum specialist," would that affect you?

A: Um, no, it wouldn't impact the way I feel because she's only one person and my team has proven to come together even stronger. We did have that period of time when we didn't have the math specialist so it's like we were doing it before the math specialist so the math specialist coming in is like the icing on the cake, you know? We don't have to do so much anymore because we now have that support, you know? And it was tough in the beginning just because we had to do every single thing but, you know, so I can answer that question by saying that I wouldn't feel any way about it because I have so many other strong minded, great people on my team who I know we can get the job done. Would I want that? No.

J: Right. So I want to make sure I understand because I think you're saying some good things. So if your specialist was evaluated and was said to not be effective, your team provides you the meat of what you do, like the meat of the curriculum support, and the curriculum specialist is just one more person to add to that? So whether they're effective or not, you still have your team so it's not even that you need the specialist so much as your team gives you that important support? Is that what I'm understanding?

A: That is what you are understanding. It's only because I have a great team. Now if I didn't have a good team then I would be in trouble [laughs].

J: It would be different. Okay, let me move on to the next question. So does your curriculum specialist follow a coaching cycle? And this is very similar to one of those models but a coaching cycle is more like, there are steps that your campus or your district expects you to take so, like, one week you plan a unit and then you focus on a lesson plan and then you focus on making an assessment and then you analyze the data and then you start all over again. Does your curriculum specialist, as you've seen so far, follow any kind of coaching cycle like that?

A: I do not think so.

J: Okay, so do you think that affects your capacity as a teacher? Do you feel like you are less able to do your job because the specialist does not follow a coaching cycle, per se?

A: I don't feel like I'm less able to do my job because it's all about the individual, you know? I don't feel like someone else would hinder me from doing what I need to do.

J: Yes, like you are educated and determined enough to do it yourself without the support of someone. And that support, like you said, is just icing on the cake.

A: Yes, that's correct.

J: So you're saying basically that you can do it on your own with the support with your team because it's all dependent on the individual and you're strong in your job?

A: That's correct, no one is going to hinder me from doing what I need to do. If I have to go stay up all night and figure out what needs to be done, then that's just something that I'm willing to do as an individual to make sure my students are successful.

J: Right. Now, how does that affect your decision to remain at your campus? In the case that you are having to do this all by yourself because maybe there is no coaching cycle or your curriculum specialist was not deemed to be effective? If you were doing all this work late at night outside of contract hours, how would that affect your decision to stay?

A: It would play a major, major role because I'm ending up getting burnt out. I'm ending up getting tired, you know, not really having much energy, no work-life balance, you know. So I would want to be somewhere where I am supported and I don't have to worry about, you know, being up at night and trying to figure things out for my students.

J: Alright, so one last question for you and this one is kind of a tough one. What matters to you more as a teacher - the relationship that you have with your curriculum specialist or their level of effectiveness? Because someone could be great at their job or not, but they could be a good person or not. So what matters more to you - the relationship you have with them or how effective they are?

A: What matters more to me is how effective they are because we don't have to have a great relationship because you're not my student and I'm not your student, you know? We should all have a common goal to do what is in the best interest of the students, so if you're effective, then that means my students will be effective, you know? So I don't really care about a relationship. I would love to have a great, positive working relationship but their effectiveness is more important to me.

J: Right, because that's what has the bigger impact on the students.

A: Yes.

J: Well, Allison, those are all the questions I have for you today. Is there anything else you would like to share that would be relevant to my study or that I need to know?

A: I think that curriculum specialists are very important and very necessary for teachers to have... hm... how do I want to put this...for teachers to be more successful with student achievement.

J: I think you said that well. So you're saying that student achievement would increase if teachers had the support of curriculum specialists?

A: Yes, you said that perfect.

Appendix M

Transcript of Interview with Tara Adams

J: Okay, so if you could just state your name for the sake of the recording.

T: Tara Adams, principal at Star Elementary.

J: And then if you could confirm that you are participating in this interview of your own free will?

T: I am.

J: Thank you. So thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Can I just start by asking you how long you've been in education?

T: Uh, this is my 23rd year in education.

J: And how long have you been in your current position?

T: This is my second year as principal here. I was associate principal and then assistant principal here for two years. So this is my fifth year in Southwest School District.

J: Perfect. So a little background... what led you to choosing a career in education?

T: Um, it's kind of in my background. I come from my mother who was in education, my father was in education, my grandparents, um, were farmers and so even though they did not matriculate through the grade levels or have high levels of education, they always stressed that they wanted better for the kids and their grandchildren. And so, when I was young, one of my grandfathers, before passing away, wanted to learn how to write his name so I used to try to help him do that and you know, just kind of starting from there, that passion. Then when I went to college though, that was not my first direction but then I ended up back here so that's how I do know it was a calling and I enjoy working with students and, you know, trying to just really do something that makes a difference and has a lasting impact.

J: Right. So in terms of what your district provides for your teachers, how would you describe the professional development they receive, for new teachers specifically?

T: Okay for new teachers, they have what's called an ABC plan. Now all teachers actually receive this but when new teachers go through new teacher orientation, they receive theirs and, um, that ABC plan, um, it's an acronym. Um, it provides them with the courses that they need to take in order to become familiar with the curriculum that we're using, the instructional strategies, the instructional approach that we use within the district. So beyond just having that content knowledge, it's more so like what is specific for Southwest School District. And so, um, we also offer in house training. We do have content specialists on the campus that go in and provide PD for teachers. They do model lessons and things of that nature and then within PLCs, um, they also provide training.

J: So does your district offer any kind of induction program or a mentoring program for new teachers? Can you kind of specify what the procedures are?

T: Correct, we do. This year there was some additions to it because of House Bill 3 and so all new teachers and now, um, for the two years, they have to have a mentor and so the district created specific guidelines that they have to follow, um, certain dates that they have to meet by, um, and in the binder, every mentor and mentee receive a binder and within the binder there are certain agenda topics that they have to cover and check off and sign off on for each time they meet. Then as an administrator, myself, as well as my APs, we do binder checks. They have to

submit their binders so we can look at it so we can make sure those meetings are happening. We have, once a month, a new teacher meeting to where we touch base with the new teachers to see, you know, “Hey, is there anything we need to be aware of? Are your mentors meeting with you? Are you getting all your questions answered?” So just trying to make sure that that is a systematic process that is beneficial to the new teachers.

J: In those monthly meetings, is that a campus initiative or is that a district expectation?

T: That is a campus initiative.

J: Can you describe the level of administrative support in the way of how present are you and your APs and how you’re able to be there for the teachers? You have to deal with discipline, you have meetings yourself that you have to attend, you have things and people that you need to answer to. So how present do you feel like you guys are able to be in their classrooms, in their PLCs, things like that?

T: Correct. So, um, that was a concern last year so we’re really making a consistent effort to be present and more visible for the teachers. It is myself, I have an associate principal, two APs, three counselors, so it’s seven of us on my leadership team.

J: That’s great.

T: And so we shared with the teachers that they are going to see us, we’re going to be in the classrooms. Myself, you don’t see it now here in my office but I have a chart, um, that has all the teachers’ names listed and then there’s a column for myself, my AP, the associate and the other AP. So any time we go into the classroom, we come back and it’s red, yellow, green. Red means there’s a concern, yellow means, well red more so means we need to provide some support. Yellow means they were doing okay but there might be some concern. Green means they’re on point. And so each week when we go in, um, we come back and we, you know, color code that particular teacher and at the end of the week we meet as a team to see were there more red dots in 2nd, were there more yellow dots in 3rd, so we can... that helps us kind of gauge if it’s an individual teacher issue or grade level issue, instructional. And, you know, and that’s not to say we wait until the end of the week to give the teacher feedback. As individuals, we’re meeting with the teacher but as a collective leadership team we go back and we see where we need to put emphasis as it relates to the grade level as a whole. But that also helps us to see “Okay, we’ve got a lot of dots so that means we’re in a lot of classrooms.” If there’s not a lot of dots, then that’s my way of making sure my APs are out as well because if there’s not a lot of dots you weren’t in a lot of classrooms.

J: Right. So that is a system you guys had in place last year as well but this year you’re trying to get into more classrooms than you were able to before?

T: Correct. And then the district mandates for TTESS that we do at least five walkthroughs each week so, you know, that’s something we have to meet on the district level. And when you spread that across the four administrators, then, yeah, you know, that’s a lot of walkthroughs. That’s a lot of walkthroughs.

J: Yeah, that is. For your campus, just in general as a whole, can you provide a description of their academic performance for last year? Like maybe your STAAR, or TEA rating that just came out?

T: Uh, not proud to share that, I will admit, but I am a very transparent administrator so we are currently at a D and so we, um, have big gains that we need to make. We already know where our target areas are. We are working in conjunction with Region 4. We had one of the Region 4

reps come out and do a training with the staff on accountability from Pre-K to 4th so that every grade level understands the impact that they have and how everything, everybody works together.

J: Everyone has a piece.

T: Everyone has a piece, it doesn't just fall on 3rd and 4th grade. And then, specifically, she spoke to, provided a training for 3rd and 4th grade on what we specifically need to look at and do point wise to get from the D, we're aiming for a B. I'd love an A but we're aiming for a B. And so, you know, we had that day of inservice so, you know, not trying to weigh the teachers down with all the heavy information up front but I needed everyone to know what, and I even discussed that in the interview process with the teachers I hired. I told them up front, we have had preliminary results since early July so I was able to tell them, you know, coming on board here. You know, when you take a job, you're saying you want to work and you're going to give 100%. I needed 110%, 150% because we...

J: Well, because the kids deserve that.

T: Exactly. And because we have some larger gains that we need to make versus what some other campuses might have to make. So they knew that up front and the group of teachers that came on board are very energetic, very passionate, saying that they were willing to take that challenge and I believe them. And so I think we're off on the right start. I think I have a group of teachers that can really turn it around. I had to get rid of some teachers last year, um, that were kind of set in their ways, not willing to change. Um, we did a book study here on the campus, Transforming School Culture. In it, it talks about believers, tweeners, fundamentalists and survivors. So we even had shirts made that said "I believe" because I need a campus of believers. Last year I had a lot of fundamentalists and some survivors so I, you know, I'm not saying I got rid of them, but, you know, they... some of them I did. Some of them chose to go and do other things but I think we have a larger amount of... a lot of young, younger teachers that are just, you know, ready to really dig in and still believe that all kids can learn. Sometimes the veteran teachers tend to shift to the mindset of if a kid is behavior problem, push them to the side, I'm not going to worry about them, that's the one I could afford to lose. But we can't afford to lose any children.

J: So I want to ask one more question about the academics and then I want to actually ask more about the culture. Have you seen a difference between math and reading? Do they both perform about the same or do your kids perform better in one or the other?

T: Our kids actually perform better on the math which is ironic because you tend to say well if they can read, they'll do well in math. Our kids performed better in math than they did on reading. That's one of the district initiatives is to have all students reading on grade level by 3rd grade so we're really pushing literacy. But [sighs] historical data shows for the campus that the kids typically perform better on the math. I think that was attributed to the particular math specialist that we had. The teachers, you know, that were there. Um, I'll just kind of leave it at that. But, so, our focus is really on the literacy and building that up. And writing.

J: So then touching back on to that culture and climate that you were talking about with the different types of teachers that you had on staff last year, can you just give me a few words that would describe it overall? You already touched on this so you don't need to go too in depth. Just the overall culture and climate last year.

T: Um, if I could sum it up in just a few words, I would... it's... it was more or so that... more or so that, um, teachers were almost functioning as if they were burned out. Um...

J: From the beginning?

T: Yes, from the beginning. And again, we're working with a population of students that require a lot. Um and so, you know, I don't know if that was it. I, you know, can't always put a finger on just one reason. When it's teachers you can have multiple things, some teachers can have personal issues going on. So there was a lot of contributing factors but then when you pull them all together it equaled to students not succeeding. And that's the take away for me as well that there were other things that I could have done. I as a first year principal now see that there are a lot of things that I want to do differently. But I think it was just... we did a lot as it relates to team building and, um, you know, teacher recognition, but when I look back on it, those things, you know, like giving treats and we would do jean passes and, um, praise notes but, um, those may not have been the specific things that the teachers think they needed. Just like with children, we talk about their Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. You have to be specific to what the needs are and it could be different for every individual person and so I think it was, for me, something that I want to change. It was a lot of lumping everybody in to one category like everybody's not getting this or this is how I'm going to recognize... and that may not have been what each individual person needed. So it really wasn't boosting their confidence or building their morale because that's not really what they needed. So this year I'm trying to be individualized, um...

J: More intentional.

T: More intentional, exactly.

J: Talking about your students, you mentioned that your student population may need a lot from their teachers. Can you talk about, just overall, the demographics, the types of students that you guys service?

T: So we're a very diverse campus. So percentage wise, we're mainly African American or Hispanic but we do have students from Turkey, from Africa, from Japan. Um, so in that regard, very diverse. Now of course some populations are smaller than others but, um, to look at where everyone is coming from, it's a diverse population. So teachers have to understand the different cultures and the different backgrounds and belief systems that the students come with. Helping teachers focus this year, with our help, teachers will understand that, um, what is the saying?

Uh... fair is not always equal.

J: Equal and equitable.

T: Right. And the picture that I always show them is the three kids standing on the boxes.

J: Looking over the fence.

T: Looking over the fence, right. Because, you know, a lot of times teachers, again, we talk about just lumping everybody into one category, having to help them to understand that, you know, all kids are not going to be taught the same. All kids are not going to behave the same and you have to design your instruction to meet those needs. So that has been one of the focuses for our inservice trainings and things like that.

J: So moving specifically on to your campus' curriculum specialists, can you describe your professional relationship with them? Um, like what your expectations of them are in terms of working with teachers and what their roles are?

T: So my relationship with the specialists is very, um, hands on and not hands on in dictating to them what to do but we meet weekly. We have a standing CIA meeting so I can keep my finger on the pulse of what's going on.

J: CIA?

T: Curriculum and instruction. And assessments, sorry. So, um, the expectations include them being in the PLCs, helping teachers analyze data, um, modeling, presenting instructional strategies, um, best practices that the teachers should be using, working with them on the pacing guide. They attend the planning sessions with the teachers so just kind of being a resource for the teachers.

J: So speaking of your PLCs and your planning meetings, are those two separate meetings that teachers attend?

T: Those are two separate meetings.

J: Are they weekly?

T: The planning sessions are weekly and then every two weeks we offer the PLCs, ninety minute PLCs during the day. We embedded that into the master schedule. The kids, we fixed it to where they go to specials for extended time so that the teachers have time during the day to meet. There were issues with teachers having to stay. I mean, they were staying, this was like several years ago, they were staying until 7:00 or 8:00 trying to plan and, you know, get everything and then some people could stay and some people couldn't. Everybody wasn't on the same page. So we adjusted our master schedule to fit that need and embedded that time within the day. Now, some still will meet independently, they meet at each other's homes and share plans. Um, but we do provide that time so that that's not required that they stay after school.

J: The modeling of the lessons, is that something where if a new teacher was interested, they can just ask for it? Or is it something that's just offered to them? It's not that they have to meet a certain quota of the amount of times they model?

T: That's correct. So any new teacher can ask for it if they're not feeling comfortable with a concept or lesson or strategy. But then also if we're going by and conducting observations and we see there's a need then we will tell them, you know, "Ms. Gaines is coming in and will model a lesson for you. I want to see you take notes and then we can come back and talk. What did you see her do that you can implement?" Kind of converse like that.

J: So, essentially my research focuses on teacher retention, specifically in first- and second-year teachers, in low socioeconomic schools. That's where I've always worked and I, as a first- and second-year teacher, depended a lot on my instructional coach so I'm trying to see if there's a tie between teachers choosing to stay on a campus and the support that they get from their instructional coaches.

T: That's an awesome research topic.

J: Thank you. So I have three proven effective methods of instructional coaching. If you wouldn't mind taking just a glimpse through them and then if you can identify if not one, then maybe a combination of any of the three, that you think your campus' specialists align to.

T: If I had to pick, I would probably say it's more along the line of Knight's Three Step Process with a little bit of the Duessen coaching group. Because our teachers, um, the specialists or like I said, the leadership team will identify the teachers' area of need and then, or the teacher can identify that within themselves, and then they will learn because they will watch the specialists model teach or, you know, the specialists will meet with them and they'll discuss and then we go

back and see if the teacher is implementing what was discussed or what was modeled for them. So I think it's more along the lines of that.

J: Okay. And then, for the last school year, would you have characterized both your math and reading specialist as being effective according to these definitions?

T: Um, I would definitely say that the math specialist was effective. Um, I can't say that for the reading specialist. No offense to her but we were, um, in the interim of hiring people. We started off with one person...

J: As a reading specialist?

T: ...as a reading specialist in August. They were released in September. Then we got another person, um, that kind of stepped into that role but they were servicing multiple campuses so we weren't fully getting them. And then Ms. Gaines stepped in in January. And she was new to the position, so, you know, she had somewhat of a learning curve. Excellent, she moved into that role straight from the classroom. So, um, excellent teacher, strong with instructional strategies, but you know, going into a specialist role is different.

J: Working with adults is different.

T: So there was a bit of a learning curve so not that I think she can't be effective, but I think this year we'll really see that.

J: So I only have one more question left for you. From the conversations you've had and what you know of your new teachers from last school year, your first- and second-year teachers, do you think, in your opinion, that the specialists had any impact on them returning? The relationships that they had with their specialists.

T: I do, I really do. Um, I think, and just overall, well I know you said specifically to the specialists, but I think overall, um, you're on the right track in saying I think the amount of support that new teachers receive really plays a part in whether they come back or not. Again, with my book study, we're talking about the tweeners because that's what they're called, the first- and second-year teachers are the tweeners because the book talked about research shows that in those first three years is when they decide if they're going to stay in the profession or not. So I shared with my staff, especially with the mentors, these are the ones that we really want to capture, we want to model good teaching for them and, um, be positive role models for them so that it is a profession that they want to stay in. I do think that if they feel supported and they see the benefits of what we do and that we do make a difference, it would lead them to want to stay.

J: Yes. Those are all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me specifically regarding the new teachers or specialists from last school year?

T: I think that's it.

Appendix N

Transcript of Interview with Carla Gaines

J: Again, Carla, thank you so much for agreeing to chat with me today. Before we begin, can I just have you confirm that you are participating in this interview of your own free will?

C: Yes.

J: Perfect. So I want to go ahead and inform you of what this study is about. I am currently working on a case study about first- and second- year teachers, so teachers who are early in their career, and how their decision to stay at their school was impacted based on how they worked with an instructional coach, or in your case, a curriculum specialist. I want to ask you some questions so that I can gain some insight into your perspective as the campus' curriculum specialist. Do you have any questions about that?

C: No.

J: So if we can start with your background, how long have you been in education?

C: I have been in education for 12 years now. I started my first five years out in Richardson School District working as a sixth grade teacher. Then I left and went to Anderson School District for three years. And then I went back to Richardson School District teaching sixth grade for three more years and now I am at Southwest School District and this is my second year.

J: So in Southwest School District, before you were a curriculum specialist, were you also a classroom teacher?

C: I was a fourth grade teacher for the first semester last year.

J: Okay. So all of your years were spent teaching and this is the first time that you have jumped into the role of curriculum specialist. Was that a difficult transition for you or did it just come naturally, like you were ready for the challenge?

C: It was difficult because I started midyear so I had to leave my students behind so that was the most challenging part for me. Do I stay in the classroom and finish my year with my students or should I take this opportunity? Obviously I chose to take the opportunity so that was really hard and difficult for me.

J: I'm going to kind of jump around with some of my questions because I want to ask you a follow-up around that. So, you said last year, so in 2018-2019, you started off your school year as a fourth grade ELA teacher and then midyear you went ahead and took the jump into curriculum specialist and took on the new challenge.

C: Correct.

J: Did you receive any kind of professional development? I'm curious because it was the middle of the year, if you received any kind of job training for that?

C: No, that was difficult for me so, um, so everything that I'm learning about the job, I kind of had to learn on my own so it was like I was just thrown out there. So I didn't receive any type of training.

J: So then how would you compare that midyear start data to this year where you are starting off at the beginning of the year? Did the district or campus treat you as if this was your first time as a curriculum specialist and maybe you received some different professional development?

C: No, you know, our department went through a lot of changes, so...

J: At the district level?

C: Yeah, all of our team members that were called the CIA team, curriculum, assessment and instruction department, all of those members are no longer here with me. The only one that's here with me is the secondary specialist and so right now I currently have all new, you know, counterparts. Again, did I receive the training? No. So it's kind of like I'm learning still as I go, even though this is my first full year as a curriculum specialist, I'm still learning as I go. That's still a struggle for me.

J: I can imagine I would feel the same way. That would be very hard.

C: Yeah, yeah.

J: So I'm going to go back a little bit. What led you to choosing a career in education? Like you explained, you've been in a few different districts, you've been primarily a classroom teacher until joining the curriculum specialist pool, so to speak. What led you to that in the first place, just being in education?

C: I've always had a desire to work with kids. Um, when I was in school, I want to say in middle school or late elementary school, like 5th grade, learning was a struggle for me. I grew up in a single parent household. My dad actually dropped out of school in seventh grade so he struggled with reading. I remember I had at least two teachers that really went the extra mile to help me and they went beyond being a teacher. My mom passed away also when I was five, so it was kind of like they were my teacher and I looked at them like a mother figure. It kind of made me want to be a teacher. During high school and then once I graduated from high school, I still didn't have my mind set on being a teacher. I majored in sociology. It was just something that was always tugging at me to become a teacher so that's when I finally made that decision. I was working at a law firm prior to teaching and I wasn't happy. I wasn't happy sitting at a desk and working 8:00 - 5:00 so that's when I decided to go to school through an alternative program and I decided to make the transition to the classroom.

J: And once you got into the classroom, did you feel like everything clicked into place, like that was the right thing for me?

C: It was the right thing, but it was difficult switching and making the transition from being in a law firm setting versus a classroom. I enjoyed it but it was just the transition part that was difficult for me at first.

J: Since you came into education, have you considered leaving to maybe go back to working in a law firm or something else like that? Or are you pretty set that this is the career path you?

C: I'm pretty set that this is the career path. Do I want to... I have my principal certification so I am looking in other areas in education so I'm thinking about if I'm interested in becoming an AP. I still would like to stay in education.

J: Yeah, but there are so many different opportunities to try.

C: Yeah, exactly.

J: So my next few questions are going to focus on last school year. So I understand that you were only a curriculum specialist for the second half of the year which also becomes very busy as we go into STAAR testing. So just answer these questions as best you can through the lens of the curriculum specialist and separating that teacher part from the first half of the year and just focusing on the spring. Then if you want to note how anything is different this year, then please feel free. So, how would you characterize the level of administrative support you received in 2018-2019 as a curriculum specialist?

C: The administration on the campus, the campus principal, they were great. Like, I... if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have made it so they were awesome in helping me transition into this new position.

J: Good, so you felt like they were there to support you? Whereas the professional development might have been lacking, your campus administrators... did they step in in that way to help guide you and move you forward?

C: Yes, at the elementary school we normally have weekly CIA meetings on Wednesdays and so we would cover different things like teacher observations, any concerns, anything dealing with curriculum, we would discuss that on every Wednesday. There was an open door policy so any time I had questions or concerns, I could always go to the administrators for support.

J: Is that the same this year? Have you felt the same level of support this year?

C: Yes, yes. We all work together pretty much as a team.

J: Perfect. Alright, so then can you describe or provide a general description of the students' academic performance throughout 2018-2019? So obviously as a specialist, you work with all grade levels. So if you could speak to maybe some overall trends that you might have seen within the students and their academic performance or maybe if the teachers shared with you any needs that they had in terms of reading that were common across the grade levels? Something like that.

C: Well, um, I can speak on fourth grade. Fourth grade, um, we had a lot of new teachers and so, um, I think they lacked professional development, so they struggled a lot throughout the school year. A lot of those teachers did not return and that's the same thing for grade three as well. So there was a lot of, um, confusion I guess within the curriculum and I don't feel as though, you know, the district did a good job but I think we could have done a better job at offering professional development and resources for the teachers.

J: Right. So because of that, touching on a few things you mentioned, confusion with the curriculum, teacher turnover and teachers being new and lacking sufficient professional development, do you think that that impacted student achievement last year?

C: Yes, definitely, yes.

J: Because if teachers are not equipped with the tools that they need, how can we expect them to teach students?

C: Exactly.

J: So have you guys made any adjustments this year moving forward? Reflecting on what the teachers needed last year and how some needs didn't get met, did you guys make any changes for this year?

C: Yes. One thing that we're doing now, for example, when we give professional development, we come back a week later and do a follow-up, especially for the new teachers. We're trying to be more, not so much go into classrooms like "I got you," but be more visible in the classrooms, modeling different strategies for the teachers, during the PLCs at least ten or fifteen minutes every PLC, we'll model some type of strategy. In the staff or team meetings, we're doing reading across the curriculum so that includes math, science, social studies. Even though the district may not provide certain professional development courses right now, we're still doing some of those things as a campus.

J: Right, so you guys are taking your teachers' needs and you're making campus based decisions?

C: Yes, yes.

J: So continuing on that, how would you describe the culture and climate at your elementary campus last year, in your experience?

C: Um, we struggled because, you know, you have to understand too, we had a new principal. I don't think that... you know, anytime you have a new change in administration, that can also lead to a change in the campus culture so I think that that impacted the campus culture last year. You know, teachers didn't really adjust to that change very well.

J: And do you feel like you have seen a shift this year?

C: Yes. We have, mainly a brand new school. We have like a full new fourth grade team. Only two or three teachers returned. A lot of the ELA part, third grade, all new teachers. Second grade we have new teachers so I feel like we have good teachers in place. We just have to continue to equip them with skills.

J: Continue to grow them.

C: Yes.

J: Okay, so how would you describe your professional relationship with your campus' teachers? So when I say professional relationship, I mean what are things that you do that are either inside or outside of your job description in order to support those campus teachers?

C: You know, I try to do little small things. For example, we take CBAs and DBA tests so normally the teachers would have to scan their own scantrons. You know, I know that they have a lot of various things to do so I'll try to do little things like get their scantrons and scan them for them. I'll sometimes go to their classrooms and model and give them a break because I can tell when a teacher is frustrated. If I pass by and see that a teacher is frustrated, I'll give them like a ten-minute break and I'll take over their class for them. I try to do little small things just to try to help, you know, make copies or just the little small things. I've been a teacher before and I know the struggle and how you become overwhelmed and there's so much that you have to do in one day so I try to do little things to relieve their stress.

J: Right, because those little things do add up.

C: Yeah.

J: So can you touch on, maybe, if you guys have a PLC structure or planning meetings or some of those instructional responsibilities that you have that support teachers? Because that's your job... your job is really twofold, right? You have those little things that you know that teachers appreciate and so you go out of your way to do that but then there's also, according to your job description, other things that you're responsible for. So what are some of those things that you have to do?

C: We have to attend the PLCs. At the elementary school, every other week is a ninety-minute PLC. The way that it goes, the team leader, we have team leaders at the elementary school so they are mainly, like, in charge of running the PLCs. I may come in if I have something instructional-wise to go over with the teachers. I may go in the PLCs for maybe, like, twenty minutes and I'll do my presentation. I'm still in the PLC after that but then the teachers take over. They collaborate, they go over their lesson plans for the following week, they discuss data or we discuss data. I also have to attend their planning sessions during the week whether it's during school or after school.

J: So then you're that instructional guide for them?

C: Yes.

J: Okay. So there are several different effective coaching models that are proven to be effective based on research. I'm going to read you a description of those and then I want you to identify the model that is most aligned with your coaching model, which one fits your personality or just what most aligns with what your campus asks of you.

C: Okay.

J: The first one is called the teacher oriented coaching that is done in a group. That is where the teachers are all working together in a group with one instructional coach or one specialist. As they're working in a group, you guys would get together and talk about curriculum, lesson planning, data and it's like you provide professional development. It's really focused on a curriculum based meeting. There is another model that is Jim Knight's three step process where coaches follow three steps with classroom teachers. You identify their areas of need, you help them learn how to improve it, and then they work on improving it and you adjust based on when you monitor them and see their improvement. Then you start the cycle all over. Identify a new area of need, learn how to improve it and monitor after that. The last model is Elena Aguilar's inquiry based and cognitive coaching model. This is where you would start first when analyzing student learning and then you would meet with the teachers so that you can discuss how the teachers should alter their instructional delivery to improve that student learning. Then, you would meet with the teacher to reflect on their current practices and just make sure you're going through a cycle of analyzing student work and adjusting teaching methods. I know that was a lot of information I just gave you. Which of those models do you feel like you personally align with the most?

C: Right now it would be the first model.

J: Okay. The instructional coaching that is done in a group.

C: Yes.

J: And that sounds like what you just described when you spoke about the PLC and the planning process.

C: Yes.

J: So I'm going to go back to that one and review that description. So, teacher oriented coaches spend their time focused on honing teachers' skills to improve classroom instruction. In this category, the coaching time is spent primarily in a group setting. The instructional coaches also spend a lot of time planning for curriculum meetings and attending professional development as well as providing it to teachers. So, if you align with this method, do you think, reflecting on your own practices, that you have been and are an effective curriculum specialist? I know that's a tough question.

C: I still feel as though, as I stated earlier, I still feel as though I still have things and areas to improve on myself. Being that I am, like, new, I still consider myself new. I still have areas of improvement but I feel like I'm doing an okay job but again, there are still things that I need to work on. As far as, um, I'm the only specialist for Pre-K through sixth grade and so it's just a lot of responsibility that I have to cover for all these different grade levels and I'm trying to just organize myself to meet every teachers' needs. That's the area I'm struggling with right now.

J: Right. It's a balancing act.

C: Yes, it is.

J: You're trying to make sure you meet everyone's needs, like you said. So then, speaking on effectiveness in general, what do you think is more important to teachers - the relationship that

you have with them on a personal level or your level of effectiveness? Because, like you spoke about, you go the extra mile by doing things that you know the teachers will appreciate, like organizing things, making copies and scanning scantrons. That would speak to the personal relationship that you have with teachers. Then there's also your effectiveness in those planning meetings and PLCs. Which of those two components do you think is more important to teachers?

C: I think the effectiveness will be more important. I mean, it's great to build relationships and things like that, but at the end of the day, it's a job. So, if I were a teacher, I would want my specialist to be knowledgeable and, you know, provide strategies or things that I would need in order to be an effective teacher.

J: Right. I understand that completely.

C: Yeah, yeah.

J: So then you as a specialist - what is more important to you? Your personal relationship with the teachers or your level of effectiveness for them? I think I already know the answer but I want to make sure.

C: Yeah, level of effectiveness is what it would be for me.

J: Okay, good deal. I only have one more question for you.

C: Okay.

J: Do you believe that providing direct support to your campus' new teachers, because again, my campus is focusing solely on teachers early in their career, like their first or second year... so do you believe that providing direct support to them has affected their decision to stay at your campus? Did it affect them last year and then, as a follow-up, do you think that your support this year will affect those new teachers that you have on your campus and motivate them to stay?

C: Yes, um, I think last year, as far as last year, there were a lot of things going on within the curriculum department itself. I think that impacted the teachers from last year. Um, I think yes, my level of support or effectiveness will have an impact this year as well on the first-year teachers.

J: Well, those are all of the questions that I had prepared for you. Do you think there is anything else that would be relevant for me to know about your experience as a curriculum specialist and how that has gone for you and how you have worked with new teachers?

C: No, I just feel as though even being a specialist, you know, you don't know everything so you still have to provide, in any district, provide your specialist with training in itself so they can be, you know, the best specialist that they can be for the teachers. It's very important to train your specialists so they can train others. That's just my, you know, opinion about being a specialist so far in my experience.

J: Well, and that aligns with what we know about teachers. You know, the support that teachers need, just because you're technically a specialist and no longer a classroom teacher, doesn't mean that you require something different. You need the same thing.

C: Exactly.

Appendix O

Follow-up Questionnaire Administered to Classroom Teachers

1. Please describe the professional relationship you have with your curriculum specialist this school year (2019-2020).
2. How does this differ from the professional relationship you had with your curriculum specialist during the past school year (2018-2019)?
3. How do you feel this will impact your teaching capacity this school year (2019-2020)?
4. Do you foresee this professional relationship impacting your decision to remain at your campus at the end of the year?

Appendix P

Example of Southwest School District Job Description of Curriculum Specialist

POSITION:	District Content ELAR Specialist-PK-2 (Part-time)
JOB DESCRIPTION:	<p>The primary purpose of the District Content ELAR Specialist-PK-2 is to work as a colleague with classroom teachers to support district efforts to increase English Language Arts achievement. The District Content ELAR Specialist will also assist in the development of elementary (PK-2) ELAR teachers through professional development, model teaching, data analysis, and training as necessary in order to ensure student success. Finally, the District Content ELAR Specialist-PK-2 will assist the Chief Academic Officer and principals in the development of short- and long-range plans for the enhancement of the Elementary English Language Arts program to meet the needs of all student populations.</p>
JOB QUALIFICATIONS:	<p>Bachelor's degree from accredited university Master's degree preferred Valid Texas GT training/certificate preferred teaching certificate (in assigned area)</p> <p>Special Knowledge/Skills: Deep understanding of instructional pedagogy Success as evidenced by student results in the area of ELAR. Deep understanding of current ELAR Standards for the State of Texas (TEKS) Experience with interpreting and disseminating STAAR data required Strong knowledge of curriculum design and instruction in English Language Arts Knowledge of Elementary ELAR programs Knowledge of the District's reading initiatives Skill in instructional coaching and in supporting ELAR teachers with a variety of background and experiences Experience in conducting professional development Strong leadership, organizational, interpersonal, and organizational skills Ability to work well with diverse populations Ability to evaluate instructional programs and teaching effectiveness Ability to plan/provide prescriptive instruction aligned to campus goals Ability to positively impact systematic change within the district in accordance with district goals</p>
DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:	<p>Instructional Strategies/Curriculum</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Works with teacher (in teams or individually) to refine their knowledge and skills; Methods of instruction may include in-class coaching, peer observation, co-teaching, and modeling effective instruction using a gradual release model. 2. Mentors teachers for the purpose of improving Reading instruction and build their capacity to teach others. 3. Establishes a coaching partnership with teachers. 4. Identifies a compelling measurable goal for coaching interactions. 5. Responsible for leading and evaluating the school's ELAR curriculum and instruction for grades PK through 2. 6. Provides intensive instruction to struggling students in the area of English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR). Such instruction may be provided either within or outside the classroom. 7. Plans and conducts periodic evaluations to assess the need for changes in the ELAR program. 8. Observe classroom instruction on a regular basis for PK-2 ELAR teachers on campuses assigned; provide feedback and assistance to classroom teachers to facilitate improvement and innovation

9. Demonstrate teaching strategies with students in the classroom for teachers identified as needing assistance through modeling techniques.

10. Conduct professional development for teachers by providing them with additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practices. The candidate must provide essential leadership for the campuses' reading programs by helping create and supervise a long-term staff development program that supports teachers.

11. Responsible for leading and evaluating the school's reading curriculum and instruction from grades PK through 2.

12. Coordinate the school's PK-2 ELAR program both horizontally and vertically.

13. Responsible for leading teachers through the district's literacy plan, "Literacy for All" for reading teachers in grades PK through 3.

Data

14. Obtain and use evaluative findings (including student achievement data) to examine curriculum and instructional program effectiveness for the assigned subject area.

15. Present content-related data to teachers/administrators.

Responsibilities and Duties

16. Assists teachers in the development of local assessments.

17. Assists teachers in the development of highly qualified instruction that engages all students.

18. Works with teachers to develop and implement effective intervention strategies and programs.

19. Collaborates with teachers and administrators to make instructional decisions based on what is best for students.

20. Assists teachers and staff in improving student performance on State Assessments by assisting teachers in disaggregating and interpreting Reading and Writing data.

21. Support classroom instruction through modeling and mentoring.

22. Create logically sequenced pacing guides for all grade levels as signed.

23. Develop campus/district common and formative assessments.

24. Assist with overseeing the district's literacy initiative plan.

25. Plan and present district-wide professional development.

26. Assist with the assessment of instructional material needs and purchasing.

27. Attend regional content-related leadership meetings.

28. Attends professional development as appropriate.

29. Maintain a professional relationship with colleagues, students, parents, and community members.

30. Use effective communication skills to present information accurately and clearly.

31. Work cooperatively with CAO and campus administrators in developing and supervising the instructional programs for ELAR teachers.

Other

- 32. Demonstrate behavior that is professional, ethical, responsible, and exemplifies SMSD beliefs.
- 33. Maintain poise appropriate to situations.
- 34. Regular attendance is required.
- 35. Ability to work with peers and students and maintain confidentiality of various issues.
- 36. Perform all other duties as assigned by CAO and building principal(s).

**REQUIRED
EXPERIENCE:**

Minimum of five years of successful teaching experience, within the designated field with a strong background in English Language Arts and Reading. Successful classroom management that facilitates a high level of student engagement Experience working with at-risk students and/or Title I campus preferred

**EMPLOYMENT
INFORMATION:**

Supervisory Responsibilities: None. Working Conditions: Mental Demands: Maintain emotional control under stress, Work with frequent interruptions, Work with frequent deadlines. Physical Demands: High physical stamina necessary, Repetitive hand motions, Prolonged use of computer, Occasional lifting/carrying up to 50 pounds, Frequent sitting, Moderate standing, walking, reaching, and bending Steady phone interactions Environmental Factors: Frequent district-wide and statewide travel Occasional prolonged and irregular hours Some night activities Frequent working alone.