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by

Lindsey R. Schoppe

March 2017

A STUDY OF THE PROBLEM OF TEACHER RETENTION IN AN URBAN  
SCHOOL SETTING

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfilment  
Of the Requirements of the Degree

Doctor of Education  
In Professional Leadership

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March 2017

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, **Curtis Wise III**. I came home from work one day, and I told you I wanted to go back to school. You did not question me as to why I wanted to go back to school again, but said nothing but words of support and encouragement. Every day you have offered those same words of support and encouragement. On days where I could not find the motivation to carry on, you were there to motivate me to continue. On days I wanted to throw in the towel, you were there to encourage me to keep pursuing my goal. You will never truly understand how grateful I am to have such an amazing and supportive husband that believes in every dream I have as if it were your own. Thank you for being you. I don't know what I would do without you. I love you to the moon and back.

## Acknowledgment

**Mom and Dad:** Where do I even begin? From the first day of school through this Doctoral program, you both have been there every step of the way. You both have always taken an interest in my education always making sure I had whatever I needed to make it through successfully. I feel so lucky to have parents that support every goal I have ever set for myself. You both are always right there with me encouraging and supporting me. I am so lucky to call you mine. I love you both so very much. Thank you for always believing in me.

**Dr. MacNeil:** Thank you so much for agreeing to be my committee chair during this journey. It has been quite the journey, but you were always there to offer support. I appreciate all the time you took to answer calls, texts, and to meet up when needed to make sure I stayed on track. I truly appreciate all of the guidance and help you have offered along the way.

**Committee Members, Dr. Emerson and Dr. Hutchison:** Thank you both for being part of my committee and offering me support and guidance through this process.

**Dr. Todd Davis:** Thank you for agreeing to be part of my committee. Thank you also for being a mentor and someone to offer support and advice when needed. I have enjoyed working with you.

**Cohort 6:** I am so thankful to all of you for working with me and pushing me along to get to the finish line. Without all of your support, I do not think I would have accomplished my goal. In addition to daily support and pep talks, I have also found lifelong friends. I feel so thankful to have shared this journey with all of you. We did it!

**Friends and Family:** Last, but certainly not least I want to thank my friends and family for encouraging me along this journey. Whether it was through text messages, Facebook posts, phone calls, or visits, I found support and encouragement in each of you.

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Schoppe, Lindsey R. "A STUDY OF THE PROBLEM OF TEACHER RETENTION IN AN URBAN SCHOOL SETTING" Unpublished Doctor of Education. Doctoral Thesis, University of Houston, March, 2017.

#### Abstract

Attrition rates in the teaching profession have increased from year to year. The critical issue of teacher retention influences instruction and student achievement. Many school leaders, having teacher attrition issues, have searched for solutions to retain and to attract new teachers. The purpose of the study was to determine the reasons why teachers are leaving an urban school district and what strategies could be implemented to reduce the attrition rate. Also examined in this investigation were conditions that contributed to teacher resignations and to conditions that would sustain teachers in their current roles. In this investigation, two focus groups, with 10 participants, were held. Of specific interest in this qualitative study were the reasons they provided for their resignations from one urban school district. Participants were teachers who resigned from one school district and accepted teaching positions in another local school district. In this study, only effective teachers were selected for the focus groups. Participant responses in the focus groups were analyzed by identifying common themes among participant responses. Data were generated through the focus group responses to 11 designated questions. Results showed the important role that school principals played, as well as their leadership in regard to teacher retention. Other themes that were present in the participant responses were: a negative culture and climate, ineffective communication, and lack of support for teachers. Based upon these themes, school district leaders are encouraged to examine ways in which school principals might influence teacher decisions to stay or to resign.



The themes identified and discussed in this study provided information to school district leaders and to school principals regarding reasons that teachers do not remain at their current school campuses. Researchers are encouraged to conduct more in depth analyses of how principals influence teacher retention and teacher attrition in urban school districts.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction to the Study**

#### **Overview**

What does it mean to be a teacher? Teachers serve a variety of roles such as mentor, facilitator, and coach, just to name a few. From outside of the profession looking in, people might think teachers have it easy and say things such as they have three months off in the summer or every holiday they receive vacation. These comments make it seem as if the profession is “easy money”. Then why do teachers leave the profession if it is “easy money”? Perhaps more exists to this profession than summers off and holiday vacation. People from outside of the profession do not begin to understand the complexity of what it means to be a teacher. Teachers are leaving the profession every year or moving from school district to school district. Questions begin to arise such as why does one district retain teachers better than a neighboring district? These questions are vital to uncovering what it takes to retain a teacher.

School districts desire to retain effective teachers, but as each year comes around, teachers are afforded the opportunity to renew their contracts with their current districts, resign and leave the profession altogether, or resign from their current districts and apply for, interview, and accept jobs in other districts. At one point in time, teacher contracts were not renewed because of budget cuts and teacher job shortages, however, this situation is no longer the case. At any given time throughout the school year, Texas school district websites have teacher jobs posted in October, December, and March. These postings would suggest that most Texas school districts are not fully staffed throughout the year. If districts are not fully staffed, then students are missing out on

instruction or class sizes that are larger due to the staff shortages. Because of this, student achievement could be influenced negatively. Teacher retention within a district is vital to student success and improved academic achievement.

### **Background of the Problem**

Teacher retention within a school, district, and within the profession in general has been relevant for many years. Brief moments of budget cuts have occurred where this situation was not present, however, for the most part, more jobs are available than are highly qualified teachers. This situation can be devastating when a school or school district is not able to retain its teachers. As a school leader, one of the most important things that must occur is to keep teachers from year to year (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). A variety of policies and procedures are present that every district and school leader must evaluate from year to year; however, the focus in the summer tends to be on filling vacant positions and not necessarily why those positions need to be filled in the first place. The policies and procedures that are evaluated from year to year will have difficulty withstanding new teachers coming in every year, for the policies and procedures will not become fluid and seamless if they have to be retaught every year (McLaurin, Smith, & Smillie, 2009). With re-teaching that must occur from year to year, teachers and the campus as a whole will have difficulties reaching higher standards due to the constant change. Just when policies and procedures might become successful and consistent, teachers resign and interrupt the fluidity of the procedures. According to Good and Bennett (2006), attrition rates are growing, so what are district leaders and school leaders doing to combat growing attrition rates? Documented in the research



literature is that leaders have implemented some ideas to retain teachers; however, schools are still facing the same issues, retaining teachers from year to year.

Once identifying the presence of a problem or an issue facing schools today, the reaction or action taken becomes extremely important to making change happen. Change will not occur by once a year, a group of district and school leaders meeting about the increasing attrition rate of teacher and how to fill the positions if nothing takes place to change what is causing the increasing attrition rate. In the summer when teachers are on vacation, school leaders stay behind to staff their schools. School leaders and Human Resource Departments work long hours to make sure the schools are staffed and ready for the first day of school, however, the job does not stop there because teachers need ongoing support (McLaurin et al., 2009). Filling a position is simply not enough, however, many times this simple filling of the position with a body is what principals do. Their main focus is filling the positions, but the positions will not stay filled for long if other actions are not taken.

With the career of teaching come many stresses that new teachers might not be aware of and therefore are not prepared to deal with their first year of teaching. According, district and campus leadership will need to provide support for new teachers to be able to deal with these stresses effectively. Different aspects of the job can become overwhelming such as mental exhaustion, students with difficult behavior, frustrating or stressful workdays, and deadlines and expectations (Hughes et al., 2015). Teachers might need something as simple as emotional support in a group setting to know they are not alone in experiencing some of the stresses that influence teachers today. According to Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012), teachers' job satisfaction will be greater if thing such as

reasonable class sizes, access to curriculum resources, positive reinforcement, and fair and consistent deadlines and workloads are implemented at their schools. If teachers are satisfied with their jobs, then they will be less likely to leave the school, district or even the profession. Many districts try to use increased salaries or stipends to attract teachers to their district, however, researchers have determined that using money as a motivator does not necessarily work for every person (Williams & Kritsonis, 2007). The downside of using money as a motivator is that it is short-lived and for some people they have a sense of entitlement that they deserve more money (Williams & Kritsonis, 2007). With this type of mentality, money as a motivator to accept a job or stay in a job will be a temporary fix to a much larger issue. The National Commission published a report that informed readers of the national crisis the nation is experiencing due to teacher turnover (Elfers, Plecki, & Knapp, 2006). A variety of tactics are present that districts and schools use to assist with job satisfaction of teachers, but despite all of these efforts, a problem still exists with teacher retention and growing attrition rates.

### **Statement of the Problem**

At the end of every school year, some change will inevitably occur within a school's staff. Change could mean a teacher is retiring, going on maternity leave, being promoted, moving grade levels, moving campuses within the district, moving districts, or leaving the profession of teaching altogether. To say no movement at all will occur is naïve because change is inevitable, however, teachers making lateral moves to other campuses or even more alarming, other districts raise a red flag for the district. If teachers are leaving the district to accept a teaching position in another district, then one must ask what is it about the district and this teacher's experience that resulted in his/her

desire to leave? If this question could be answered, then the process of what changes may need to be made, policies and procedures need to be created, and support systems that need to be implemented could begin to combat this growing problem. Teachers develop negative attitudes and become discouraged with the teaching profession when a culture of collaboration is not present, and for this reason, school leaders must make sure to foster this type of culture within their schools or the result will be losing some of the best teachers (Williams & Kritsonis, 2007). The problem here is that teachers may feel negatively about their current jobs or the teaching profession as a whole, so as leaders, efforts to prevent such feelings need to be implemented to ensure that more teachers decide to stay and build capacity within the position.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the reasons why teachers are leaving an urban school district and what things could be implemented to reduce the attrition rate. District and school leaders wish to retain their high quality, effective teachers from year to year because they know that retaining teachers will have a positive influence on student achievement just as not retaining teachers will have a negative influence on student achievement (McLaurin et al., 2009). Student achievement is a top priority in schools and school districts because this profession serves kids and their success. As such, their well-being should always be first.

To conduct the study, a focus group was formed and questions were asked about teachers' experiences in an urban school district as well as their reasons for choosing to make a lateral move to another neighboring school district. Also included were questions that had the teachers explain what conditions if any could have been changed or altered to

entice them to stay. The research design used in this investigation was a qualitative approach. Teachers met with the principal investigator one time for approximately two hours at a school in the urban school district. The sample of teachers was a convenience sample for at one time or another, the principal investigator worked with the teachers in some capacity. Teachers were selected who previously worked in the urban school district but then left the district for another teaching job in another neighboring school district.

### **Significance of the Study**

Once the study was conducted and the data analyzed, the information that was obtained will be valuable to a variety of people. From the focus group questions, the principal investigator will receive first-hand information concerning why teachers chose to leave the urban school district for a lateral move to another local school district. If the district were to have this information, they could use it to evaluate current support systems and policies that are already in place. With evaluation of these support systems and policies, the district might find that some areas could be changed to support teachers better and have seamless policies and processes. Once that is completed, then the district could monitor the effect of the changes on the teachers and if indeed those changes helped to reduce the attrition rate. A reduction in the attrition rate would mean being able to build capacity within teachers. With building capacity within teachers, student achievement would improve. Therefore, the district, teachers, and students of the district would benefit from the study.

Another group of people who might benefit from the study would be other districts or schools who are also struggling with retaining teachers. People could identify

where things were similar within their school or district and adjust accordingly. The information gained from this study could help a multitude of people in their quest for retaining teachers, which in turn affects student achievement. According to McLaurin et al. (2009), having a high turnover every year can affect student learning negatively if the more effective teachers are the ones who are deciding to make these lateral moves or moves out of the education field. Schools do not want their most effective teachers leaving creating a possible decline in student achievement. It is for this very reason that schools and districts will want to know common themes for why teachers would choose to make a lateral move and what possible things that could have been implemented to encourage them to have the desire to stay. This information would be invaluable to district and school leaders.

### **Primary Research Questions**

The following questions helped to guide this study:

#### Research Question One

What are the conditions that contribute to attrition within the district?

- A. What attributes or conditions influenced the choices to apply, interview, and accept a teaching position within Urban ISD?
- B. Describe how the following had a positive or undesirable influence on educators and their teaching.
  - a. Urban ISD
  - b. Individual Campus
  - c. Urban ISD staff members (district level personnel, campus staff members, administrators, counselors, other teachers)

- C. Explain the levels of support received at the district level, campus level, and department level.
- D. What are the conditions that contributed to leaving Urban ISD after interviewing for a teaching position in another Texas School District?
- E. What are the reason(s) for seeking a lateral move outside of Urban ISD?

#### Research Question Two

How can these conditions be addressed to retain teachers?

- A. What could be done to retain Urban ISD's current teachers?

#### **Research Design**

In this study, data were collected during the focus group session with approximately 10 teachers who worked previously at the urban area school district. As mentioned, participants were previous employees from the urban area school district. These participants worked as teachers within the district and chose to resign from the district to accept another teaching position in a different Texas School District. The sample was a convenience sample because each of the participants had previously worked in conjunction with or alongside the principal investigator.

During the focus group, participants were asked 11 questions concerning their time in the district, their experiences regarding support at various levels, their decisions to apply for other jobs and accept them, as well as possible conditions that could have kept them in the district. Participants were provided with a copy of the questions to refer to during the focus group. Every participant received an opportunity to contribute to the

discussion. From the focus group, the principal investigator identified themes and common issues that occurred in participant responses to the questions.

### **Assumptions**

During the focus group, it is an assumption that all participants will answer the questions asked to the best of their abilities. Participants should feel comfortable to be open and honest with their answers. Only through information being obtained openly and honestly can these data be used to retain teachers and improve student achievement.

### **Limitations**

Despite efforts to make participants feel comfortable to share open and honest answers, some participants might feel uneasy about divulging potential sensitive information about a district where they were once employed. This uneasiness could create an issue by answers being given that are brief and surface level, which would in turn affect the data and findings from the study. For accurate data to be collected, participants must answer honestly about their experiences within the district.

Another limitation of the study was that the participants have crossed paths with the principal investigator professionally within the district. As such, this situation could present another reason why participants might feel hesitant to answer as openly as they would to someone they do not know for fear that others could find out what they said during the focus group. Confidentiality is a key component here for participants to answer openly and honestly. Potential biases from the researcher could be that the researcher has worked within the district. As such, the researcher is not coming in with an outside perspective but rather more of an insider perspective. This investigator,

however, was not present to contribute to the conversation but, rather, to be the facilitator to collect valuable data.

### **Scope**

The scope of the study was on 10 teacher participants who currently resided around Urban ISD and who worked as teachers for another Texas School District. Teachers who fit the criteria but were currently in other states were not considered for this study.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations imposed by the principal investigator was on the use of a specific school district. Not part of this investigation was teachers who resigned from school districts other than from the urban school district. This delimitation restricted the possibilities of who could participate in the focus group.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. Attrition—This term could also be referred to as the turnover rate each year for teachers. Attrition is decreasing in numbers, which in this case would be referring to teachers resigning and the number of staff members the school has retained decreasing in amount.
2. Retention—Retention for the purpose of this study represents teachers who sign their contract from year to year and remain in the district as opposed to applying to other districts and accepting jobs in other districts.
3. Lateral Move—A lateral move is when an employee changes positions but does not change to a position that is considered a promotion but instead changes to another position to do the same job before the move.



4. Movers—Movers are considered teachers who “hop” around from campus to campus within the district or outside of the district. These employees like to change placement often.

### **Summary**

This study consisted of a focus group about teacher retention in an urban area school district. The purpose of this study was to determine the reasons why teachers resigned from and accepted another teaching job in a different Texas school district. Based upon the reasons that were identified, the hope was to be able to determine what support systems and policies could be altered or changed to increase retention of teachers and lower attrition rate. In the review of literature, seven different sections will be analyzed through available literature and research. These seven sections include: successful schools, effective school administration, school turnaround, leadership concepts, effective leadership, effective teachers, and teacher attrition/retaining teachers. Provided in the review of literature will be an in depth analysis into what makes schools and leaders effective, which in turn, has a positive influence on teacher retention and student achievement.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

With teacher retention remaining a consistent issue among schools across the nation, examining the underlying issues that cause teachers to leave their current positions could assist in lowering teacher attrition. With the ability to lower teacher attrition, campuses would have the ability to build capacity within the teacher, which in turn, as previously discussed, could improve student achievement. Many different variables affect a school's ability to retain teachers. The variables that have been documented in the research literature include good schools, good school administration, school turnaround, leadership concepts, good leadership, good teachers, and teacher retention. These conditions do not exist in isolation of each other but, rather, intertwine with each another in a variety of ways. Each condition affects one another, which is the very reason all the conditions are of utmost importance to schools.

#### **Good Schools**

The first condition examined is good schools. What makes a good school? What does that look like? If an individual were to walk in a school, would he/she know immediately if this campus was a good school? Numerous characteristics of good schools have been documented in the research literature. Some of these characteristics are mission for the school, leadership within the school, teachers within the school, building relationships between staff members and students as well as staff members with each other, family communication, parental involvement, school climate, environment, and high expectations. These variables do not exist in isolation from each other as many conditions contribute to teacher retention are also not in isolation. Perhaps this particular

issue in education is extremely hard to battle because so many conditions contribute to this issue. If one variable is changed, it may affect another related variable. Balancing all of these conditions is quite challenging, yet schools are faced with this balancing act on a daily basis.

**Mission.** Many, if not most, schools claim to have a mission for the campus, but what does that really mean in terms of all stakeholders and for the school? To ensure the best opportunities for student success, a school must have a mission that is accepted by all stakeholders. This mission should be one in which all stakeholders believe in and are committed to for the school and its students to be successful (Cowley, 2004). Many principals create missions, yet a lack of understanding may be present regarding what it means or how it will be carried out in the school year. A student, teacher, or parent should be able to recite the mission if it is communicated clearly and effectively. If all stakeholders are not aware of the mission and its purpose, then buy-in may become an issue. For some schools, a mission is created and it might even sound as if it will be effective, however, the school leader must ensure that all resources and training for staff are implemented for the mission to be carried out effectively (Cowley, 2004). During the summer, teachers are preparing for the new school year by attending staff developments and planning while principals are at the school preparing for the new school year. The principal may come up with a catchy phrase to be the mission for the year, but if it is not carried out and no purpose or meaning is tied to it, then it will not be effective.

Establishing a strong mission with collaboration from all stakeholders along with a plan that details how the mission will be accomplished will set the school up for a successful school year versus the alternative.

**Leadership.** One component that greatly affects the determination of a good school is the type of leadership that is in place. The effectiveness of the leader in a school influences almost everything within the school. It is because of this situation that the role of school leader is one that must be right or nothing else will be right within the school including teacher retention. Collaborative leadership is imperative to ensure success within a school no matter the different styles that will vary from principal to principal (Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, & Matthews, 2005). The leadership role should not be one in which the leader alone decides how teachers will teach or what lessons should be utilized. Without ownership from stakeholders, the school will not thrive to the extent it would if it was a collaborative effort. In this collaborative effort, the school leader will not be the only leader on campus. Leadership will extend to teachers and students.

Including parents in the school setting is imperative. For example, parents heading up a community service program for students to participate in show parents contributing to the mission of the school not just the school employees (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006). In this example, students and parents took leadership roles within the community and for the school. The lessons that were taught during the community service time were of immense value to the students' education. Creating leaders among stakeholders will strengthen the effectiveness of a school. Apart from fostering leadership among stakeholders, the principal must also be a strong leader. It is without a doubt that teachers are the key to increasing academic achievement in schools, but the effectiveness of the school leader is almost of the same importance (Erb, 2006). A strong emphasis has been placed on teachers and how to keep teachers and how to enhance their teaching, but attention should be paid to the leadership role as it greatly

influences the effectiveness of teachers, which in turn affects the achievement of students. Once the principal hires great teachers, how does he/she mold the teachers into effective teachers who positively influence student achievement? In sports, a coach can be excellent at recruiting the best talent in the nation, but if the players go to the school and do not produce, it can be contributed to the coach's inability to form a solid team that works together collectively (Erb, 2006). Several important points are present here. One, just because a principal is able to recruit and hire capable teachers does not mean those teachers will turn around and produce as expected. The job of a principal does not stop once a teacher is hired; it begins at this time. If a principal is unable to create a team-like atmosphere and an environment in which teachers thrive, then the hiring process was for nothing and teachers will slip into undesirable habits resulting in underperformance. Leadership is extremely important to the success of the school, teachers, and students. For anything else to be good, school leadership has to be good first.

**Teachers and building relationships.** When a teacher is hired to work in a school, the principal who conducted the interview is putting belief in this teacher to produce results for the students and for the school. Apart from knowing classroom management techniques, the latest teaching strategies, or being a master of content, the teacher will need to possess something else that is difficult to determine in a thirty minute interview. The teacher must possess the desire and ability to build relationships with his/her students. It is of utmost importance for school leaders to recruit and hire good teachers who care about students and who foster a positive learning environment. No individual program in and of itself can create this type of teacher (Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, & Matthews, 2005). This certainty comes directly from an administrator who

had seen for him/herself that the students did not necessarily need to come knowing everything from previous grade levels or be the top performing students in the grade; the teachers needed to build positive relationships with students for students to experience success. This ability is a difficult trait to determine in a 30 minute interview. How can the principal know that the teacher he/she is interviewing will have the desire and ability to build positive relationships with students? In one school, a leader shared that the school attributes gains in test scores to the ability of the teachers to work well with and relate to the students (Cooper et al., 2005). Not only does training play a vital role, but the teacher's personality also plays a role, and the ability of the teacher to work with each student and relate to each student also plays a vital role in the process. Without the desire and personality to build relationships, teachers are going to experience increased management problems and lower test scores. These are two things that no teacher wants to experience but may not realize he/she is the one contributing to this negative experience. With increased management problems and students consistently displaying low-test scores, the teacher may become burnt out from the job and want a change. This situation is where teacher retention can be tied to building positive relationships with students. Part of building relationships is showing caring and respect towards the students even when it might not be reciprocated at first. Teachers must model appropriate behavior and respect before receiving it wholeheartedly from students. Schools that are considered good schools show values such as caring and empathy among others (Benninga et al., 2006). Part of showing care and respect is taking an interest in the students past the classroom and relating to the student as a human being. Researchers have documented that schools at the highest levels academically attribute their success to

the support given to the students through positive attitudes and relationships that are built between teacher and student (Lipsitz & West, 2006). A school can have teachers who know the most content and the most effective teaching strategies, but if those teachers do not build relationships with their students, then other schools that build positive relationships with the students will outperform the other school nearly every time.

Incredible value is present in building an environment in which teachers and students work well together. Part of building relationships with students is them knowing that the teacher genuinely cares about them. Students are quick to pick up on if a teacher works hard to make sure they have the best or if the teacher's attempts at building relationships is disingenuous. Students notice teachers who put in extra work to make them successful, for these teachers are not the individuals running to the parking lot and beating the buses out of the parking lot every afternoon (Towns, Cole-Henderson, & Serpell, 2001).

Students not only pick up on what is going on within the classroom with the teacher, but they also see the teachers who race to their cars as the students are boarding the buses.

These behaviors send the message that the teachers are so happy to leave the school and that maybe not a great amount of importance is placed on their jobs as teachers. Teachers may not understand the influence they have on their students, but it is of utmost importance that they do understand to build positive teacher-student relationship, which in turn will have a positive influence on student achievement.

**Communication with families and parental involvement.** As students get older and sometimes even when they are younger, teachers express concerns about parental involvement with the students in their classrooms. If a school is going to have increased parental involvement, effective communication with families' needs to be present. In a good school, leaders will actively involve parents within the school. As such, a greater sense of urgency and importance is then placed on school at home (Cowley, 2004). The school must include parents as part of the school community or the parents will not show the involvement they could have if made part of the school community. Without parental involvement, not as much importance is placed on education. This lack of emphasis on education will, in turn, affect the students within the classroom. As mentioned previously, all of these different conditions are intertwined, so if one is not present, it then affects another area. Schools who advertise to have parent involvement because they send a letter home inviting the parent to a curriculum night are misguided on the meaning of parent involvement, for it is more than simply inviting parents to the school (Lipsitz & West, 2006). A school's idea of parental involvement in some cases is having a curriculum night or an academic carnival for parents to come with their students to experience the curriculum that is being taught. This one night is not going to make the parents an integral part of the school community and it is likely to not produce a great turn out if it is simply one night. Involving parents is a process and takes careful planning to ensure that parents become an integral part of their students' education. Researchers have documented that community and parent involvement is key to creating a successful school (Pritchett-Johnson, Livingston, Schwartz, & Slate, 2000). Every school must find a way to increase parental involvement within the school and not just on



one or two nights out of the year. Parents need to be consistently involved in their students' education. This involvement will not happen without the principal and the school devising a plan and writing out the steps that will help this situation occur. Once the plan is in place, monitoring will come into play to make sure the plan is effective.

**School climate.** School climate is an integral part of running a school, and it can be hard to foster a positive school climate and can be even more difficult to undo a climate that has become unsuccessful and negative. School climate is not something that is easily defined (Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Some of the conditions include school safety, discipline of students, supports available academically, relationships, and environment as it relates to the buildings and properties. Many of the individual conditions that affect a school are all intertwined within school climate. School climate is something that encompasses many things and therefore will have a great effect on schools and student achievement. The climate of a school will affect everything from behavior to academic achievement, so principals must carefully plan how they are going to foster a positive school climate within their schools. Researchers have determined that a positive school climate is able to increase positive behaviors in students as well as increase student achievement (Voight et al., 2013). School climate has the ability to make ineffective schools become effective. Knowing the important role of school climate is extremely powerful for educational leaders. Researchers contend that improving school climate could be the answer to increasing academic achievement, however, it is not enough to just know the answer, and the leader must also know how to foster a positive school climate.

**Environment.** The environment and visual appearance of a school although cosmetic, has the ability to affect how stakeholders perceive the school. When someone drives by the school or is walking up to the school, this visual appearance constitutes the first impression that is made. Schools that are viewed as good schools make sure that what stakeholders see when they arrive on campus is pleasant to the eye because the appearance of the campus shows school pride (Benninga et al., 2006). If items are left on the floor, the building is not clean, or anyone can access any part of the school, this appearance may create an environment that is first of all not safe and secondly an environment that is not clean or orderly. Students will not take pride in their school and education if this situation occurs. The appearance of a building can determine whether the building is inviting to parents or not inviting (Benninga, et al., 2006). Every member of the staff contributes to the environment of the school whether the principal of the school or a member of the custodial staff. All stakeholders play a part in creating a safe environment for the students, and an environment that they can be proud of and want to be part. Apart from being clean and orderly, the school needs to be welcoming to students, parents, and community members. If a school wants parents and community members to take part, the environment should be welcoming. A first impression can have a lasting influence on all stakeholders, so it needs to be positive.

**High standards and expectations.** Administrators and teachers must believe that their students are capable of achieving academic excellence. It is not enough to say that high expectations are present if the administrators and teachers truly do not believe the students are capable of meeting those expectations. In a good school, high expectations are set for all staff members and students, and every student has the ability to access the

curriculum through a variety of methods such as mentoring, tutoring and other supports to students (Lipsitz & West, 2006). Teachers must be committed to making these events happen because if they are not, then high expectations are not present for all students, only some students. If a student knows a teacher is going to give up on him/her at the first sign of struggle, then the student will end up giving up on him/herself. A commitment must be present to making sure all students have access to the content in the way that will make them most successful even if it takes more effort from the administrators and teachers.

### **Good School Administrators**

Although most schools report to a central office or are organized into districts or public school systems, much is still left to the school administrators on each campus. With the guidance of central office staff, school administrators make more decisions than one can count on a day-to-day basis. Because of this, school administrators can have a significant effect on the school, teachers, and in turn student achievement. The importance of an effective school administrator is sometimes overlooked, and it is detrimental to schools and student achievement if the most effective person is not selected for the position. Many aspects exist in which to view the administrator role as it encompasses many different components.

**Strong leaders for success.** Throughout the years, many people viewed an administrator as someone who took care of the day-to-day maintenance and operations of a school. Although these responsibilities are certainly part of an administrator's job duties, his/her influence goes further than the maintenance and operations of the school. For a school to be considered an effective school, strong teachers and strong leaders need

to be present (LaPointe & Davis, 2006). It is noted that apart from effective teachers being the number one condition that affects student learning, effective leaders come in as a close second. The influence of a leader is far more important than most educators believe or realize. In addition, schools in need of reform must find and develop an effective leader to improve the school's academic achievement (Martineau, 2012). No matter the school or the condition of the school, a strong, effective school administrator is necessary to begin or maintain academic success. Administrators have the duty of supporting and developing teachers as well as making sure processes are in place for the organization of the school to run seamlessly.

As with any educator, school leaders are also lifelong learners, and research shows that leaders who continue to grow and craft their skills, will improve the success of their respective schools (Cawelti, 1981). This concept is not new, however, it is one that may go unnoticed with most of the focus on improving instruction through growing teachers. Although this concept is important, growing leaders is also of utmost importance. Strong school leaders, administrators, are responsible for many things for a school to run effectively including a vision, common goals, positive climate, consistent monitoring of processes, and appropriate interventions where necessary to name a few (Rutherford, 1985). An administrator who demonstrates these characteristics will in turn affect his/her school in a positive way, for a great administrator is behind every great school (Spiro, 2013). Researchers such as Halinger and Heck have documented that school administrators, school leaders, have an effect on student scores (Hauserman & Sheldon, 2013). Although this influence may not be direct, it still remains that effective leaders will in turn create effective schools. Many districts focus on recruiting high

quality teachers to teach students because districts know that high quality teachers will positively influence student achievement. Along with recruiting high quality teachers, the school districts should also be growing and/or recruiting high quality school administrators as they are a key piece in what makes a school successful academically and procedurally (Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry, & Hill, 2003). Although it may seem repetitive, recruiting, hiring, growing, and retaining effective, strong school leaders, is a vital piece to any school's academic success.

**Perception of principals.** As with any occupation, media outlets such as television shows and movies create a certain view of principals that is inaccurate in many cases (Glanz, 1997). These media products not only skew the views of stakeholders in regard to principals but also can alter how principals think of themselves as well. As previously mentioned, the role of a school leader is nearly as important as the role of the teacher in the classroom in regard to student achievement. As such, principals must be careful to not confuse their job duties or perceptions of themselves with the job duties or perceptions that they see on television or in movies. Many times principals are depicted in a negative or comical way, which is far from what is expected of principals in schools today. School leaders must be aware of the images portrayed on television shows and in movies as their stakeholders watch the television shows and movies that portray them in a negative way. Understanding views and expectations stakeholders have coming in could assist the principal in building relationships and changing the perceptions of those stakeholders.

**Preparation.** To become a principal, school leader, qualifications are present that must be met, however, the degree to which the schooling and certification programs

actually prepare principals to be instructional leaders and managers of their buildings is debatable (LaPointe & Davis, 2006). Universities and certification programs are not always able to simulate and teach all of the responsibilities and expectations a principal will need as the school leader, and for that reason, many school leaders accept the position and are unprepared to meet the demands of the job title (Cawelti, 1981).

Without an effective preparation program, school leaders will accept jobs that they are qualified for in terms of required degrees and training, but they are not prepared for in a sense of all the situations they will encounter during their time as school leaders. School districts hire teachers every year, and it is those teachers that are the future leaders of schools, so grooming and training their own teachers who are interested in the administration route, would benefit the school district and individual schools in years to come.

Many districts have already started training their teachers in hopes that they will become future school leaders and will encompass the training and hands-on experiences that will be necessary to be effective school leaders, principals (Adams, 1999).

Preparation that encompasses a variety of experiences is ideal for a candidate that desires to become a school leader. The preparation must go beyond a university preparation program and must include hands-on experiences for future leaders to understand the decision-making skill set and leadership qualities needed to lead a school successfully.

Without more specific training, school leaders are left to figure out what to do and how to do it, which is leaving school success and student achievement up to chance.

**Building leadership in others.** Whereas principals' jobs encompass many tasks, principals will be hard pressed to find it within themselves to complete all of these tasks

alone. If they attempt this feat, a negative influence on the school and student achievement may likely occur. Part of being an effective leader is identifying leadership qualities in others and building capacity within staff members to ensure the school is running effectively (Spiro, 2013). Sharing the leadership responsibilities where appropriate will allow staff members and the future leaders to share ownership of the vision and goals of the school. This shared ownership will create a united front ready to problem solve and take on the day-to-day situations that will arise.

**Time management and stresses.** Although school leaders have the ability to build capacity of staff members within their schools, they still have many different things that they are responsible for, and ultimately, they will be the ones held accountable whether leadership responsibilities have been shared or not. These types of expectations can cause stress and time management issues for school leaders. They are expected to juggle all aspects of running a school effectively all the way from instructional leadership to managing routines and procedures of the school (LaPointe & Davis, 2006). School leaders must find a method to utilize that will effectively manage their time and ways to deal with the stress the job entails. In addition to the stresses of running a building including discipline of students and employees, work environment, climate, instructional practices, communicating with stakeholders, overseeing the daily routines, and improving student achievement, school leaders also face pressure from district offices (Martineau, 2012). The bottom line for many districts is raising standardized test scores, but effectively running a school will require more than just raising standardized test scores. Although increasing student achievement is the primary concern of most district personnel, the principal position is made up of many tasks with no relation to increasing

student achievement and instructional practices (Adams, 1999). Principals tend to work long hours and have what seems like endless amounts of paperwork that may or may not have anything to do with curriculum and instruction. Much pressure is placed on principals to become effective instructional leaders, however, school leaders may find this situation difficult if much of their time is taken up by tasks that are loosely related if at all to instructional leadership. The days are long gone where the school leader is only expected to run the school smoothly in regard to operations (Spiro, 2013). The expectations of school leaders have changed drastically from decades ago, yet the time given to complete the expectations remains the same as previous decades. Therefore, principals are charged with the task to complete more instructional components and have higher expectations placed on them with the same amount of time as principals before them have been given. As such, this situation is where the use of the word stress comes in and time management becomes an extremely important condition for school leaders. Without an effective balance of demands, school leaders will become too stressed out to influence positively a school and in turn student achievement.

**Vision.** With every year, comes a sense of a fresh start for school leaders and their employees. Part of starting a new school year is embodying a common vision and a common set of goals among all staff members. For principals to begin a school year effectively, buy-in needs to exist for the vision among the majority of staff members (Martineau, 2012). Without buy-in from staff members, principals will not be able to serve as an effective leader of the campus instructionally or in regard to operations. Part of what makes a good administrator is seeking input from the staff and creating a common vision among all staff members. Although not all staff members will be



completely for the vision, a group of educators with a common purpose alongside their leader is much more powerful than the vision of one person. Along with a vision, school leaders must also create common goals for the school with teacher input (Rutherford, 1985). The common goals will lay a road map, which will show how all staff members will contribute and be held accountable for the vision. Student learning will be a key focus in the common vision and goals. Not only will the common goals hold staff members accountable, but students should also have goals and high expectations set for them (Spiro, 2013). With high expectations and common goals for everyone, a stronger sense of buy-in and unity will be present among all stakeholders.

**Communication.** When school leaders begin to create a vision as well as common goals among all stakeholders, communication of expectations and the vision is a key component if it will be carried out successfully. If staff members, students, and parents are unsure of the direction of the school, then they are less likely to reach the expectations set forth by the school leader. School leaders who successfully and clearly communicate with stakeholders have added one trait of an effective leader to their lists (Batsis, 1987). Although this trait is not the only trait an effective leader possesses, it is an extremely important one as leaders communicate every day, several times a day. If they are not able to communicate in an effective way, then many things will be affected by the poor communication or lack of communication.

**Monitoring expectations.** Along with being able to communicate effectively, school leaders must also monitor expectations set for staff and students. It is not simply enough to assume that because teachers are professionals, they will follow all expectations set forth to the best of their abilities (Rutherford, 1985). Teachers want their

school leaders to be visible and part of the learning culture within their classroom. Many leaders go in classrooms for required walk-throughs and observations from a teacher appraisal system; so many teachers will go the entire year with very few visits in their classrooms other than the required observations. If the most important thing is student learning in schools, then school leaders must be part of that to create buy-in from staff members and improve student learning. Visibility within classrooms and feedback that is given constructively but not required place more importance on the learning that is going on in the classroom. If a leader observes a classroom teacher that needs improvement, it is then up to the school leaders to implement a support plan in place to improve the instruction of the teacher which will in turn improve student learning. However, if school leaders are only visiting classrooms when required, then the struggling teacher may go unnoticed or may be noticed too late in the year. The importance of visibility and monitoring expectations for teachers is a vital piece that must be adhered to on a daily basis.

**Culture and climate.** Culture and climate are two important aspects of a school that have to be developed successfully or the effectiveness of the teachers, students, and school itself will suffer because of it. The culture that is cultivated in the school must reflect unity and teamwork (Martineau, 2012). If everyone is doing what they want on their own, then the perks that accompany working with a team will be missed due to everyone working in isolation. Many schools are utilizing professional learning communities where teachers collaborate with lesson plans, data, and instructional practices just to name a few things. In this scenario, teachers are able to learn from other teachers instead of only having his/her own ideas. Teachers work collaboratively to push

one another with expectations and work to provide the very best instruction for students, which will in turn affect student learning. Not only will teachers get to hear about different instructional practices, in professional learning communities, teachers will model them for other teachers. This process will allow new teachers all the way to veteran teachers to experience the different instructional practices that could be utilized for their students inside the classroom. In addition to collaborating, changes in vocabulary need to occur with respect to how things are referenced. Many school leaders are guilty of addressing things as “my” instead of “our”. These words can affect the way stakeholders feel about their part in the school. If the school is only the principal’s school, then teachers and students may not dedicate as much time and energy to carry out a vision and common goals. Along with culture, the climate of a school is also important. Researchers have determined that schools with a strong climate have teachers who feel supported and valued (Spiro, 2013). For teachers to excel in the classroom, they must feel supported and cared for in their workspaces.

**Relationships.** For a school leader to come in and build the culture and climate as previously mentioned, the school leader must also build trust with the teachers by forming relationships with the teachers (Martineau, 2012). It will be difficult for a school leader to come in and suggest changes if relationships are not built first. School leaders should not only be enforcers but should also manifest as an instructional coach to assist teachers and help them grow and improve their craft. Relationships can take time and effort to form. Accordingly, new school leaders will have to be cognizant of when coming into a new position and wanting to make immediate changes. Too many changes too fast could fracture chances of a strong relationship with the teachers at the school. It

is first important for new school leaders to observe what is already in place, build relationships and trust with teachers, then make changes where necessary for the school and students to be academically successful.

**Instructional leadership.** In previous years, school leaders were tasked with operation management of buildings, but in more recent years, school leaders have been more immersed in instruction and becoming instructional leaders. The shift of school administrators to instructional leaders began in the 1970s once research indicated that some of the best schools were as a result of a strong commitment to instruction (Spiro, 2013). If instruction is the most important aspect of a school, then the school leader will also need to be a leader of instruction (Martineau, 2012). Just as teachers continue to learn and refine their crafts, school administrators also need to keep abreast of curriculum updates and most effective instructional practices. A greater sense of buy-in will be present if teachers and instructional leaders are attending professional development alongside each other and experiencing the same things. A strong commitment by all stakeholders to learning and instruction is key in creating and maintaining an effective school (Spiro, 2013). The center of the vision and all goals should be dedicated to instruction.

### **School Turnaround**

Expectations are present that schools will perform at a certain level in regard to mainly standardized testing. When schools begin to underperform in these areas, federal, state, and district officials begin to question the way the school is run by the principal and what instructional practices are being utilized. Many schools in the United States are underperforming in comparison to other countries. This low performance has and

continues to place pressure on the government and school districts to make a change within these underperforming schools (May & Sanders, 2013). According to Mathis, almost 20% of schools in the United States could be labeled as “in need of improvement”. This statement should not be interpreted to mean that all other schools are meeting every expectation set forth by the federal and state government. This statement means that nearly one fifth of schools are at the point that the government wants some type of intervention completed to improve student achievement. This focus on school improvement has been an emphasis in the last decade as well as continues to be an emphasis in schools where students are not achieving academically as a whole. Because this situation affects many schools in the United States, the need for school turnaround cannot be understated, as it is the future of all stakeholders that is at stake (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). A clear need is present for school turnaround, however, a structured process that would work in all underperforming schools does not yet exist.

**School Improvement Grants (SIG).** Before school improvement grants came into effect, previous attempts were made by the government to assist with school turnaround efforts. It was in 1994 with the Improving America’s Schools Act that schools began being held accountable for student test scores (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). Following the Improving America’s Schools act was the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 where schools remained accountable for students’ standardized test scores but were also sanctioned for schools that did not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP). According to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), approximately 70% of the nation’s schools met AYP during the 2006-07 school year. The remaining 30% of

schools were either classified as in need of improvement or in need of restructuring where schools had to follow the same approach as all other schools to restructure in hopes of improving student performance on state standardized tests. This method did not yield a high success rate for the schools in need of restructuring and therefore it was back to the drawing board to implement something that could make a difference in these underperforming schools and improve student achievement.

Because of this lack of success in restructuring of schools, the U.S. Department of Education implemented the Title I School Improvement Grant (SIG) in 2009. The purpose of SIG was to focus on the nation's lowest performing schools and help to create school turnaround for these critically low-performing schools. As one can see, from the 1990's on, the government has tried to implement a variety of acts and programs to assist the lowest performing schools in America. Despite these efforts, needs for school turnaround were still present. Accordingly, changes on the horizon with new programs implemented to aid in school turnaround may be warranted. Under SIG, four models are present that schools follow if they fell in the critically low-performing category (May & Sanders, 2013). The first model's solution to improve a low performing school was a school closure where all students from that school would be transferred to a higher performing school in the area. The second model's solution to improve a low performing school was to restart the school by converting the school to a charter school. The third model's solution to improve a low performing school was to implement a school turnaround where the principal was replaced and at least half of the staff was replaced as well. The fourth and final model's solution to improve low performing school was a transformation approach where the principal was replaced and several initiatives were

implemented. Some of these drastic measures have not been met with much success, so districts are left with finding additional methods to assist schools from falling into the lowest performing bracket in the country (Hess, 2012).

**Components of successful turnaround schools.** School turnaround is critical to success of some schools, however, it is difficult to find an optimal formula that will solve some of the problems low performing schools have from day-to-day. Below one will find sections of components that were successful in some cases with particular schools. The components below may not work for every school, however, they do constitute a compiled list of components that could contribute to a successful school turnaround. Some of the components overlap in the different experiences, which will show that this component not only worked for one school but for others as well. The first set of components included beginning with a plan of conditions that are already known to yield success (Kowal & Abledinger, 2011). When beginning such a strenuous process, beginning with something that is known to be successful is a must to get the process started. Once programs or initiatives have been implemented, a consistent and frequent monitoring plan needs to be present. If teachers know they will not be held accountable for the programs and initiatives that have been implemented, then they are less likely to follow through with the expectations. The same goes for school leaders. If district personnel is not monitoring the turnaround school, then school leaders will also be less likely to monitor themselves as well as the teachers with the expectations set forth in the plan. Celebrating early success and failures is also an important condition to consider. If it is an early success, school leaders will know to celebrate the success but will also know that this program was something that worked and will need to continue. On the other

hand, if it is an early failure, it will need to be analyzed either to make purposeful adjustments or to make major changes to the program or initiative.

The second set of components is set firm in understanding that turnaround schools need a strong leader who will offer visible and clear support for the teachers and students while the major changes are taking place (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). This set of components would include adequate time set aside for teachers to collaborate, examine curriculum alignment, ensure most effective instructional strategies, and an environment of support. For all stakeholders, the school must be a safe and structured place to be part of with community engagement as an important component. Another vital component mentioned was a strong, effective leader to take the helm on the turnaround efforts. Without this type of leader, the turnaround school would be unable to accomplish the goals set forth.

Another study was conducted in a school in the Detroit Public School System where a newly hired but experienced principal was hired to lead turnaround efforts within the school (Marrapodi & Beard, 2013). The principal shared what she implemented within the school to assist in the turnaround efforts; for these are some of the things the principal attributed their success. The principal felt that to lead turnaround efforts, she needed a staff alongside her that had the passion to do the same. Without a staff who yearned for school turnaround and was willing to put in the time and work to implement major changes, the turnaround efforts would have been unsuccessful. Accordingly, this step was the first one taken by the principal. After all staff members were hired and in place, data became a driving focus in all aspects of planning and throughout the school. An instructional team was formed comprised of various staff members that used data to



drive the decision-making process as well as to identify targeted areas that needed to be addressed. In addition to data, administrators, specialists, and instructional coaches would conduct frequent walk-throughs to guide them about what staff development and training needed to be provided to improve instruction. This process was not a “gotcha” system but was instead a way to determine the needs of the campus through data collection. Every decision the campus made stemmed from some sort of data that had been collected.

Finally, the last turnaround components were derived from a Chicago teacher who was part of a turnaround school while she was a teacher and also conducted research (Salmonowicz, 2009). The first component mentioned was in regard to supplying adequate resources. This teacher determined that this component would allow the school to purchase all materials and training necessary to assist in the turnaround efforts. However, the teacher posed a question about if the plentiful resources were actually necessary to lead school turnaround, but the author left it as a question for other researchers to tackle. Another component was to make sure the principal truly understood the task in which he/she was taking on and making sure the principal’s understanding was in alignment with the district’s goals and understanding. Communication is key here from the district all the way to a teacher in the school, clear communication must be present regarding goals and plan to take on school turnaround efforts. Teacher buy-in is a must for these initiatives to be successful, so gaining teacher buy-in by carefully planning out processes to ensure that they run efficiently is a key condition. Failure to do so could result in a loss of teacher buy-in, which could result in a failed attempt. In relation to buy-in, teachers also need to know that the school

turnaround they are dedicating their time and efforts to will have the possibility of success. No one wants to work towards goals that seem impossible.

The last component to be discussed is providing effective professional development for teachers. With a variety of major changes occurring, teachers need training and support to make sure they are comfortable implementing and monitoring the changes that are to take place. If teachers are unsure of what to do or how to do something, then the implementation of the major changes will fall flat. Such an occurrence would be detrimental to the turnaround efforts. This particular list was interesting as it was through the experience and research of a teacher versus a school leader. Some of the items listed were not the same as the components listed from the principal at a Detroit Public School (Marrapodi & Beard, 2013). This situation goes to show that it is important to look through school turnaround in a variety of lenses.

**The turnaround leader.** For most, it will not come as a surprise to know that the school leader is a critical part of the success or failure of a school (May & Sanders, 2013). The principal of a school has an influence on student achievement as well as the effectiveness of a school; therefore, putting a leader in place who understands the importance as well as has the desire to do whatever is necessary to help the school run effectively is a non-negotiable. Research shows that effective turnaround leaders take certain actions to lead an effective school turnaround (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011). With so many areas that need improvement in a low performing school, turnaround leaders must first identify a few areas that will need to be addressed immediately to result in early success. It would be impossible to begin working on every area in need of improvement and would foster a community of working towards so many goals with little

progress. A turnaround leader will not be able to take the path of a leader whose school is achieving at an acceptable academic level, so the turnaround leader might have to think beyond the norms to create positive change within the school.

With numerous changes taking place, some of the staff that was left from the previous leader might be resistant to change, but the turnaround leader must ensure that all teachers know the changes will happen, and they are not optional. The turnaround staff must have passion for the cause to obtain their goals. As mentioned previously, an effective leader uses data to drive decision-making at all times. Whether data are collected on campus, at the district level, or sent by the state, the effective turnaround leader will utilize data when making decisions for the school and for all stakeholders. Much research comes from the early stages of turnaround leadership, which explains what type of leader is necessary to ignite positive change (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). Leaders not only implement procedures to begin an increase in student achievement, but they also must keep the same conditions going to sustain such positive turnaround. Conditions such as collaboration, attention to detail, strategic changes aligned with the needs of the school, trust within the school and among leadership and employees, and continuous efforts to regenerate successes met early on. To become a turnaround school that sustains growth in academic achievement, a turnaround leader must be in place that implements the conditions mentioned above otherwise, early success will not continue.

**Community involvement.** When district or school personnel reference all stakeholders, they are not just referring to students and teachers. Stakeholders include students, teachers, parents, and community members. A wealth of literature exists

regarding the importance of parent and community involvement within schools (McAlister, 2013). It is imperative that parents are active participants in their child's education as their involvement affects student learning and student achievement. Teachers and schools who reach out to parents by way of phone calls, notes home, and parent conferences will yield an increase in parental involvement as well as a positive influence on student achievement. Parent outreach and communication is especially challenging in high poverty areas. This statement is not to say that parents living in high poverty areas do not care about their children, but it is just the opposite. Parents do care about their children's education, but the teachers tend to lack cultural awareness in communicating effectively with the parents. Because parent involvement is so critical to student achievement, schools must provide professional development on communicating with parents and cultural awareness to eradicate this problem. Effective communication with parents must occur, and it is up to school leaders and teachers to make sure this communication happens.

**Support and flexibility.** Within the field of education, many constraints exist when dealing with budget, holding staff members accountable to certain expectations, and procedures and routines within the school. Many districts create universal policies to maintain consistency among all campuses within the district, however, in a turnaround school, school administrators need to be allowed the autonomy to revise some of the constraints that are present as they are working with a much different school than other school administrators (Hess, 2012). For example, an employee at another school might receive three warnings before receiving a write up or multiple below expectations on the

appraisal system before being placed on a growth plan, but at a turnaround school, the leader might need a quicker route to the accountability portion.

For the turnaround efforts to be successful, the turnaround leader must have operational autonomies from the beginning (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011). If the turnaround leader constantly has to check with state and district guidelines in certain areas, then this checking will slow down the efforts to influence the school in positive ways. In addition to flexibility, the district must also implement a support system for the turnaround school that involves a monitoring process. If a monitoring protocol is not in place, then it is as if the major changes occurring at the campus level are not important enough for district level representatives to come and observe. This lack of presence will send a message to school leaders and teachers that what they are doing is not valued or important, which could affect buy-in.

### **Leadership Styles**

Although this statement might sound repetitive, the principal of a school is one of the most critical conditions concerning school efficacy (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). If the principal is ineffective, then the school will follow suit. The principal serves as an instructional leader as well as an operational leader, which encompasses all of the inner workings of a school. Because the principal facilitates and leads all aspects of the school and the students within the school, their influence is powerful. It is therefore critical to select effective leaders to create effective schools. Whereas some effective leaders will share characteristics, other characteristics will be present that are unique to the individual leader. It is not feasible to say that one leadership style exists that all principals should utilize to be effective (Al-Salfran, Brown, & Wiseman, 2014). Cultural conditions are

present within a school and school district that will determine the most appropriate leadership style for the principal.

**Leadership styles and student achievement.** In the field of education, student learning and achievement is at the center of everything. Student achievement determines whether a school is successful or not through the lens of district personnel as well as state and federal government, therefore, any conditions that affect student achievement must be a priority within a school. Researchers have determined that school leaders have an indirect relationship with student achievement (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). Although school leaders are typically not directly involved with instructional delivery, they still influence instruction through all other programs, procedures, and initiatives they choose to implement. These things affect teachers directly, which in turn, influences students. According to Hallinger, school leaders who implemented things in line with the vision and goals of the school were more effective as leaders and, in turn, positively influenced student achievement.

**Culmination of leadership styles.** When examining different types of leadership styles, researchers have examined why certain styles may be more successful in certain settings than others, but it is difficult to determine one specific leadership style that is successful in every situation with every group of people (Val & Kemp, 2012). This finding would suggest that a leader might weave in and out of leadership styles depending on the situation at hand. In a school setting, situations could change on a moment-to-moment basis resulting in the leader adapting to what he/she needs to be to work through the situation successfully. This information is important for leaders to understand as they may think they need to choose one style and embrace that style at all

time. If leaders were to engage in these behaviors, it could result in actions taken that are not appropriate for the audience or situation.

**Authoritarian leadership.** Although most leaders will weave in and out of leadership styles, it is important to understand the different types of leadership styles. This way a leader can identify the strengths and weaknesses of certain leadership styles and be cognoscente while decision-making. With the authoritarian leadership style, the leader will typically make all decisions without consulting with others (Val & Kemp, 2012). The authoritarian leader would not deem necessary collaborating with others to determine the best decision for the current situation. According, if some type of problem occurred within the school, the authoritarian leader would not seek ideas or possible solutions from other staff members but would simply solve the problem and implement a solution alone. For this type of leader, involving all stakeholders would not be plausible due to the desire for the leader to make all decisions and find solutions for all challenges alone. In some cases, situations might be present where this type of leadership styles is appropriate, but as mentioned several times, collaboration is also a key component contributing to an effective leader.

**Democratic leadership.** With democratic leadership, school leaders do seek the input of others unlike the authoritarian leadership style (Val & Kemp, 2012). The democratic leader seeks feedback from other people in regard to decision making and values the input of all people involved. Even though the democratic style of leadership does support feedback from other people, the ultimate decision lies with the leader. With this type of leadership style, decisions are made by the leader him/herself after consulting with other leaders or teachers. Many situations exist where input is necessary from other

people, but in many cases, the leader makes the final decision. The leader will benefit from someone else's feedback, but ultimately the decision-making lies with the leader.

**Laissez-faire leadership.** The laissez-faire leader does not insert him/herself in the decision-making process (Val & Kemp, 2012). Leaders who utilize this type of leadership style take a hands-off approach to problem solving and decision-making. Instead, the laissez-faire leader will allow others including school leaders and teachers to collaborate and problem solve together to make decisions. This type of leadership encourages group problem solving and critical thinking instead of simply providing feedback. As with any type of leadership style, certain situations occur where this type of leadership is the most effective style, however, with school leaders held accountable for student achievement, this type of leadership will likely not be used as much as other styles. Most leaders will want some type of say so in the decision-making process in most situations.

**Sustainable leadership.** A variety of leadership styles exist that are extreme in one direction or another in regard to involvement of teachers and other school leaders. With this particular type of leadership, shared responsibility among all stakeholders is a key component of sustainable leadership (Cook, 2014). Sustainable leadership also ties in to stakeholder buy-in, for if everyone is taking part and is committed to the common vision and common goals, the school will have a stronger sense of buy-in. With increased accountability, shared responsibilities among all stakeholders could be a key component to meet all the demands that come with increased accountability. Again, the leader is ultimately responsible in the eyes of the state and the district; so shared responsibility must be monitored to ensure things are operating to the standard that has



been set. As with any leadership style, a time and a place exists for each one, and it is up to the leader to determine what fits best with each situation.

**Situational leadership.** In this type of leadership style, situational leadership, leaders operate with two types of behaviors, task behavior and relationship behavior (Ireh & Bailey, 1999). Leaders will go in and out of high task behavior low relationship behavior, low task behavior high relationship behavior, high task and relationship behaviors, and finally low task and relationship behaviors. Again, much can be said about different situations yielding different leadership styles and even a variation of certain leadership styles. Task behaviors represent the organizational aspects of leadership in regard to getting stuff done. Relationship behaviors refer to the personal relationships made between the school leader and the stakeholders. Both types of behaviors have their place in situations and are important. Leaders must understand that not one section of the four types of situational leadership will assist with all situations because leaders must adapt and modify their leadership style to fit the needs of the situation at hand.

**Transformational vs. transactional leadership.** The last leadership styles that will be discussed are transformational and transactional leadership. One leadership style, transformational, has been determined to pair well with effective leaders in the education field whereas transactional leadership has not experienced as much success (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Transformational leaders serve as change agents and motivate others whereas transactional leaders simply act out of self-interest and just want to make things happen. This statement is not meant to imply that effective leaders do not have some traits of a transactional leader, but as mentioned several times before, most effective

leaders will go in and out of different leadership styles to satisfy the current situation.

Transformational leaders tend to encourage stakeholders to be part of the change process and offer input, while this encouragement is not the same for transactional leaders.

Leaders will likely display characteristics of both transformational and transactional leadership at some point in their careers, for success will come when leaders know which leadership style to apply in different situations that occur over time.

**Change leadership.** Change leadership is a style of leadership that combines a variety of leadership styles into one that combines the most effective and efficient characteristics of leaders into one. First, a change leader must stand alongside all teachers and staff members and continue to learn with them (Fullan, 2011). By doing this, the leader displays an increased urgency placed on continuing to learn to refine each person's craft. The second characteristic that change leaders embody is to be resolute and empathetic to others' ways of thinking. Effective change leaders know that change can be difficult for people but the change leader does not give up. The change leader continues forward understanding everyone's point of view and adding value to those points of view, but in the end, the change leader knows what and how to make each decision.

The third characteristic is for the leader to be able to motivate staff members. It is not simply enough for a leader to come in and flash around a new vision and expect everyone to follow. An effective leader will allow staff members to experience success. Moreover, effective leaders will determine the underlying reasons for success, which will then motivate staff members to continue to engage in the same behaviors to experience the same success. The fourth characteristic is collaboration. Collaboration is more than

just assigned group work. Staff members must be able to collaborate to truly inspire teamwork, and the change leader will be at the center of this collaboration. The effective change leader will offer multiple opportunities for collaboration.

The fifth characteristic of a change leader is to be confident but humble despite the confidence. Staff members want a leader that is confident and they can trust in, however, staff members does not want someone who thinks he/she knows it all without being humble with confidence. In addition to confidence, a change leader must know his/her influence on the school. As leaders, time is limited in getting to know one's self before taking on a leadership role, but leaders must make a conscious effort to know themselves so they will know their strengths and weaknesses and how to address them. Without knowing one's self, decisions could be made or policies implemented that are biased or inappropriate for the staff, but the leader could be unaware due to not knowing his/herself. Time taken to understand how he/she operates as a leader is of utmost importance to be an effective change leader.

### **Good Leadership**

The leadership within a school system is vital to the success and overall effectiveness as previously written above. The leader and the area of leadership is a major focus in much of the research because of the pivotal role a school leader plays in the effectiveness of a school. If the principal is not able to gain some of the leadership qualities that are imperative to experience success, then not only will the leader be affected, but it will also influence the teachers, students, and the school. An array of qualities exist that effective leaders possess and will be listed in the pages to follow. One

point that is important to remember is that without an effective leader, effective schools are not present.

**Instructional leadership.** Although much research has been conducted on the principal as an instructional leader, much difficulty is involved in coming up with one decisive definition (Irvin & Flood, 2004). The instructional leader encompasses many characteristics and the ability to have all of those characteristics into one definition has been a challenge for researchers. Instructional leadership in a sense is not one dimensional, and it is for this reason, many school principals might struggle with their role as the instructional leader because it encompasses so many different expectations to be considered an effective leader. For teachers to deliver instruction in a way that will increase academic achievement, the leader of the school must be able to model best instructional practices for the teachers (Behar-Horenstein, 1995). Many times instructional practices are introduced to teachers by articles and books where teachers must read about them or in a faculty meeting where teachers sit in their seats and hear someone talk about a new instructional practice that needs to be implemented into classrooms. If teachers are able to see someone model how to implement the instructional practice and are able to visualize it within their own classrooms, a much better chance is present that the instructional practice will be implemented with fidelity once the meeting is over. In addition to modeling, it would place a stronger level of importance on the instructional practice if the school leaders were involved in the modeling.

If the school leader steps aside every time for someone else to model, then the staff members might feel that the principal does not have a clue as to what is going on in

the classrooms. In addition to modeling best instructional practices, the principal needs to visit classrooms on a daily basis. If the principal makes a point to visit classrooms daily not only to complete required observations but also to interact with the students, then the principal will have a better idea of how the teacher needs help or recognition as well as the students (Whitaker, 1997). The principal will get to know the teachers and the students better with frequent classroom visits and participation. These visits will also show students and teachers that instruction is important. If the principal is taking time out of his/her day to be part of classrooms, then it will place an increased sense of urgency in the minds of students and teachers. In addition to the classroom visits, school leaders should also leave immediate feedback for the teachers. This feedback should be provided before the end of that school day. The feedback should include encouragement and positive observations as well as suggested areas of improvement. While principals play an important role as the instructional leader, they cannot be the only staff members that participate in instructional leadership (Irvin & Flood, 2004). Instructional leadership is a shared responsibility that starts with the principal but is facilitated through teachers, students, and parents. Everyone must have a part, as one person cannot do it alone. In a time of increased accountability, all stakeholders will benefit by working as a team.

**Curriculum.** Previously stated, the effective leader immerses him/herself within classrooms becoming part of the classroom environment and giving encouraging and constructive feedback to teachers (Whitaker, 1997). However, if principals are unaware of the curriculum that is supposed to be taught, it will be difficult for the principals to provide appropriate feedback. It is imperative for school leaders to understand the curriculum within a department as well as how that curriculum fits with the other

departments' curriculums (Behar-Horenstein, 1995). The principal will not necessarily be the master of all subjects, but the principal should know enough about the curriculum to provide valuable feedback to the teacher. Without this, teachers may not place as much value on the feedback as they would from someone who is more knowledgeable of their content. In addition to knowing about all content's curriculums on the assigned campus, school leaders also need to serve as a model for extending their own learning and ask teachers to follow.

**Lifelong learner.** Many times in staff meetings or planning times, the school leader encourages teachers to attend staff development sessions but does not always do the same in return. Just as leaders expect teachers to be lifelong learners, leaders should also be expected to be lifelong learners (Lukaszewski, 2008). School leaders must capitalize on opportunities to grow and learn every day, as this situation will positively influence school leaders as well as the teachers in the schools. It is not enough to go through the principal training program and after, only attend required meetings. For educators to excel in their current roles, they must seek out opportunities to participate in trainings and staff developments that will improve them in their current roles and beyond. A conscious effort is needed to avoid complacency.

**Main focus: Students.** With what seems like an endless list of job responsibilities, school administrators can quickly and easily become bogged down with various responsibilities. However, effective leaders will make sure to maintain the belief that more important than one's self are the students (Brown, 2013). The work that occurs daily is for one purpose only, the students within the school. Therefore, every decision that is made and policy that is implemented should be in the best interest of the students.

This statement may sound simple and straightforward, but the amount of policies and decisions that have to be made and the number of people affected by policies and decisions can become quite difficult. Even though it can be difficult, students and what is in the best interest of the students should always remain first priority.

**Role model.** In a leadership position, numerous people will be looking to the leader in reference to how to respond to news from the district or the state, and it is up to the leader to remain professional at all times. Even when it may seem as no one is watching, the leader still must maintain professionalism (Brown, 2013). Community members, teachers, and students, are looking to school leaders as a role model for the school or a representation of the school. Therefore, whether out in the community or on vacation, school leaders must be mindful of this. In addition to stakeholders looking to the principal outside of school, they are also looking at the principal inside of school. School leaders will set the tone for everyone by the actions that they take on a daily basis (Whitaker, 1997). The school leaders will need to model things such as greeting students at the door when they walk into the school or walking through hallways and greeting teachers. These types of positive behaviors and interactions model how teachers could implement the same thing for their students and starts off the day in a much more positive way.

**Building leadership capacity.** The actions of school leaders influence teachers, which will in turn mold future school leaders. School leaders need to understand the ability that they have to build leadership capacity within their staff members (Brown, 2013). It is for this reason that school leaders have the ability to provide leadership opportunities for staff members and model how an effective leader acts and carries

him/herself. As such, these leadership opportunities may affect the type of leader teachers will become in the future.

**Collaboration and shared responsibility.** Although school leaders may be viewed as the only leader on campus, this precept is far from true. Effective leadership is a shared responsibility with all stakeholders (Gale & Bishop, 2014). The principal represents a critical piece of implementing a vision and carrying out initiative and procedures, however, the principal does not do engage in these behaviors alone. For example, the way collaboration and shared responsibility can manifest on a campus is through leadership teams, student-led programs, or on-campus staff developments. In all of these scenarios, teachers or students have become an integral part of the processes that run the instruction within the school. If one person were to try and take on all of the responsibilities, schools would not have nearly as many programs and initiatives going on because it would not be possible for one person to do all of it.

With shared responsibility, it not only creates ownership among teachers and students, it also will end up giving more opportunities to staff and students because more people are involved. Now, this statement is not meant to suggest that the principal should not be knowledgeable of the programs and initiatives, but the principal does not need to head up and organize every single part of them. From the beginning, the principal might sit down with the leadership team or the student-led organizations and give them expectations and guidelines that must be followed to communicate effectively and to maintain a sense of consistency. In addition to this, the principal will be visible and participate in the programs and initiatives while monitoring them to make sure all expectations and guidelines have been followed. When working together, more can be



accomplished then working alone. This type of movement where teachers and students are part of collaboration and have a shared responsibility might be a foreign concept for some leaders.

Strategies are needed to implement teachers and students as instructional leaders. Some strategies for involving teachers as instructional leaders would be to first make a list of ideas on how to involve teachers in this capacity, implement a way for teachers to know they are capable of serving in this role, and have teachers share some of their strengths with other staff members and facilitate the conversation (Irvin & Flood, 2004). These strategies are just a few that could be used to involve teachers in an instructional leadership role. In addition to involving teachers, students should also share a part as instructional leaders. Strategies that could be used to have students share a part as instructional leaders would be to offer opportunities for students to be peer tutors or to also be part of planning units or lessons, and provide opportunities for students to offer feedback in relation to school items such as instruction and climate. Again, these are only some of the strategies that could be used to create a community of instructional leaders.

**Visibility.** One characteristic that is critical to a school's success but is many times neglected is the visibility of the principal (Whitaker, 1997). Although several tasks are present that can easily take the principal away and have him/her working diligently in his/her office, the principal must make a conscious effort to be out in the classrooms. This statement does not mean for required observations but actually out in the classrooms taking part of the lessons. Teachers and students will value what the principal values, and if that is not instruction and classroom time, then that will be visible in the teachers'

and students' priorities. Paperwork, student discipline, parent meetings, and phone calls will have to be completed but not at the expense of visibility.

**Teacher support and school climate.** In the field of education, many challenges are present that school leaders and teachers face on a day-to-day basis. For this reason, it is even more important that the school leader cultivate a positive and supportive climate for the teachers (Bartell, 1990). If school leaders take the time to acknowledge and celebrate successes or teachers going above and beyond their job description, these behaviors will help to foster a positive and supportive climate. Also, the language used to speak to teachers should also be considered as it could easily be looked over when examining school climate (Lukaszewski, 2008). Instead of using all negative words, school leaders should consciously make sure they are using vocabulary that focuses on the positive rather than the negative even when giving a directive. Teachers are much more likely to follow through as expected if these school leader behaviors are present. If not, teachers will many times internalize the negativity given off by the school leader, which is not productive for the leader, teacher, or the students. Though minuscule in comparison to other items, it is something that can greatly affect teachers, which, in turn, can influence the instruction they present to the students.

**Relationships.** When accepting a position as a school administrator, many different job responsibilities and expectations are placed on the administrator from the beginning. One aspect of the job that might differ from other leadership positions in a different field is the constant interaction with community, parents, teachers, and students. To become an effective school administrator, one will have to create positive relationships with all stakeholders (Gale & Bishop, 2014). When working with students,

the principal should get to know their names and greet them in the mornings. In addition to this, principals will find great benefit for relationship building by attending extracurricular events and participating in classroom instruction. With teachers, the principal will implement similar relationship building components such as greeting teachers, getting to know something about them besides that they are teachers, and completing motivational tasks for them such as creating candy grams with handwritten notes letting them know they are appreciated. None of these suggestions are ones that are unreasonable but are simply part of the relationship building process and are important to building an effective school as an effective leader.

**Vision.** For collaboration and shared responsibility among all stakeholders to be effective, a shared vision must be implemented collectively by the school leader, teachers, and students (Blair, 2002). Every action that takes place on the campus should be tied back to the shared vision. The vision will be the centerpiece of decision-making, goal setting, and program implementation, for the vision will drive all decisions related to the students and the school. Teachers and students should be able to speak the language of the vision and ideally would have had some part in creating the vision with the school leader. Communication of the vision should be clear to everyone and referenced to on a daily basis.

### **Good Teachers**

Student achievement is a top priority when it comes to schools. The majority of decisions and programs implemented occur with student achievement at the forefront. Researchers have established over the last decade or so that the single-most important condition at the school level that affects student achievement is teachers (Behrstock-

Sherratt, Bassett, Olson, & Jacques, 2014). Schools that have good teachers will positively influence student achievement whereas schools that have less effective teachers will have a negative influence on student achievement. School districts and their leaders must make sure that good teachers are being recruited, hired, and retained within the district to ensure an increase in student achievement.

**Passion for teaching.** When non-educators think of the teaching profession, some common phrases might come to mind, summers off, holidays off, or only working 9 months out of the year. Many people do not understand the challenges that teachers face on a daily basis and how truly difficult and overwhelming the teaching profession can be as well as to point out it is not only 9 months of work throughout the year. Due to recent teacher shortages, many teachers are being hired from the non-traditional route where they did not originally go to college to be a teacher, however, once some teachers get hired as teachers and begin their careers, it is not exactly as they thought. This dissonance can prompt a lot of different feelings such as teacher burn out, motivation to grow and learn, or teachers wanting to leave the field. One characteristic of a good teacher is a teacher that has a passion for teaching students (Miller, 2012). When teachers are passionate about what they do, students become passionate about what they are learning. Their enthusiasm and energy for their jobs radiates through themselves and through the classrooms, which in turn positively influences the students. A teacher who has no desire to have an effect on students' lives will not exude the same enthusiasm and energy and will therefore not receive the same commitment to learning from his/her students as other teachers would.

**Content knowledge.** When teaching students who have various learning styles, it is imperative that the teacher knows the content backwards and forwards. Meaning the teacher has to be able to explain the concepts expected in his/her content area in a variety of ways and be prepared to answer questions from students that go deeper in thought than the surface level of the concept. Teachers must know the content well enough to engage their students in inquiry based learning and critical thinking (Shaw, 2013). If the teacher is unsure of the content, then he/she will not be able to engage students in problem solving activities. In addition to an in-depth content knowledge, good teachers are also intelligent when communicating (Gordon, 2012). Students need teachers who are able to communicate in a variety of ways to meet the needs of all learners, and if they are unable to, the classroom instruction will suffer as a result.

**Preparation.** In addition to content knowledge, good teachers are also well prepared for their lessons every day (Gordon, 2012). Part of successful lesson planning is designing lessons that are appropriate for students and effectively managing time when planning activities or instructional strategies that will be utilized. Good teachers know what needs to transpire during lessons to meet the needs of all students including special populations such as students who are enrolled in special education or English Language Learners. A good teacher will know how the lesson needs to be adjusted or what additional enrichments need to occur to meet the needs of all students. Furthermore, if the lesson does not go as planned, a good teacher will be flexible and know how to respond to this, and the lesson will change but will be successful and meet the needs of all learners in the classroom.

**High expectations.** Coupled with being prepared, good teachers also set high but attainable expectations for their students (Miller, 2012). Students want to be challenged, and good teachers know how to challenge their students appropriately. In addition to students being challenged, good teachers not only challenge students but they know each individual student and how to challenge them so that the challenge is attainable and the student will experience success. If students feel that no chance for success exists, then this situation will be discouraging and they will want to give up. Good teachers plan for areas of struggle and set high expectations from the first day of school.

**Relationships.** Furthermore, good teachers build relationships with their students and show students they care for them and their livelihood (Miller, 2012). Good teachers take the time to get to know their students by finding what interests them and either integrate their interests into lessons or ask about their interests apart from the classroom. Teachers that take the extra step to ask about the soccer game from the weekend or the family vacation over Thanksgiving connect with students and can motivate them more than a student who does not have a teacher who takes an interest in him/her outside of the classroom. Students want to know that they are cared for and are more than just a math student or a history student in a teacher's classroom. In addition to learning students' interests, good teachers also build relationships with their students by attending extracurricular events their students are involved in during the school year (Shaw, 2013). When students know that their teachers came out to support them, this knowledge enhances appropriate teacher-student relationships, and it shows students that their teachers care about them apart from inside the classroom but also want to see them doing what they love to do.

**Classroom management.** Equally as important as building relationships with students is classroom management (Gordon, 2012). Highly effective teachers may have discipline issues on occasion, but for the most part, minimal behavior problems are present due to the respect and rapport the teacher has with his/her students along with substantial planning and preparing. Once teachers have structured the class, planned the lesson, and established an environment of respect and rapport, discipline problems are almost nonexistent. All of the things listed go into management, it is not just rules and procedures but it is also being prepared, respect and rapport among other things. A good teacher will follow through in all of these areas resulting in a well-managed classroom. In a well-managed classroom, students want to do well for their teachers and make their teachers proud of their work and behavior while in a classroom that is not well managed; students do not internalize the same feelings, which result in misbehavior.

**Engagement.** Not only do highly effective teachers have a well-managed classroom, they also conduct a classroom where all students are highly engaged in the lesson (Miller, 2012). Good teachers do not simply teach from a textbook and when finished teaching, assign another page out of the textbook to complete. Instead, good teachers come up with creative lessons that build off of student interest and engage students as opposed to sitting and getting information while working from a textbook. In addition, highly effective teachers also engage students through challenging them with problem solving and critical thinking. In contrast, a teacher who is struggling to engage his/her students would require students to complete mindless tasks that become routine and do not engage the student.

## **Teacher Retention**

Again, it is well known that teachers, whether effective or ineffective, have a great influence on student achievement. Therefore recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers is a vital part in the effectiveness of a school. Attrition rates exist in all professions, and will continue every year for various reasons, however, attrition rates that continue to increase are a concern as rising attrition can disrupt instruction for students (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). Without consistency, instructional programs within schools will face challenges from year to year. Attrition rates are higher in high poverty, low performing schools versus schools with minimal poverty levels and higher performing as far as academics are concerned. Because attrition is higher in high poverty schools, school leaders and districts will have to focus on increasing teacher retention rates and lowering teacher attrition rates. Unfortunately, students living in high poverty need the most consistency but have the highest attrition rates. Teacher retention has become a priority in many schools especially schools in high poverty.

**Positive climate.** Many aspects contribute to school climate, and the school leader has the ability to create and maintain a positive school climate. A school climate greatly influences the teacher retention rate for schools (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). For this reason, school leaders would benefit from understanding the components of school climate and how to make a positive one to assist in increasing the retention rate. The numerous components that contribute to a positive school climate are detailed below.

**Communication.** Part of creating a positive climate within a school is a strong communication line between the school leader and teachers and vice versa. School



leaders will build trust and rapport through clear communication (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Teachers want to be part of the school community, and if school leaders do not communicate the vision for the school, programs that are to be implemented, or even something as simple as communicating what events are occurring during the week at school, then the school climate will suffer due to ineffective communication. If teachers do not feel that they are receiving effective communication, then a greater chance will be present for an increase in attrition rate for the school. On the other hand, if school leaders are effectively communicating with teachers, then the attrition rate has a better chance of decreasing.

**Adequate staff.** Another condition contributing to school climate is an adequate amount of personnel (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Especially in hard to staff schools, teachers want an adequate amount of staff members to carry out the duties necessary to successfully operate a school. Without an adequate amount of staff members, additional duties would fall on teachers and add to the stresses that already affect them on a day-to-day basis. It will be left up to the district and school leader to make sure the budget has been allocated to meet the needs of each campus.

**Curriculum planning and professional development opportunities.** In addition to the conditions previously listed, time allotted for curriculum planning as well as professional development opportunities is another condition that influences school climate (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Teachers are expected to grow within their profession as well as create and plan engaging and challenging lessons for their students. If this expectation is present, then it is only natural that school leaders make sure to provide ample opportunities for professional development as well as time to plan lessons

with other teachers. Both of these components are critical pieces of school climate, and if they are neglected, could contribute to a decrease in the teacher retention rate. In addition to the school leader making sure these opportunities are available, it is also up to the school district to structure the school day to allot for planning time as well as to create district staff development opportunities for teachers.

**Teacher support.** Along with professional development opportunities, school leaders must also be aware of the level of teacher support that is offered on campus (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Even though principals can get bogged down with paperwork and other tasks, it is imperative that they make themselves available for teachers. If teachers are the critical component that affects instruction, then school leaders must treat them as so. Teachers should not feel that the principal does not have time for them or that the principal never gives any positive feedback but instead gives out orders. This type of leadership will negatively influence school climate. If teachers feel unsupported, then they will be more likely to leave than if they feel supported by their principals. Teachers need positive support from school leaders. They need to know they are doing a good job and working hard, and they also need the principal present at times when challenges are present that teachers cannot solve alone. Positive support is a component that greatly affects the teacher retention rate and therefore should be extremely important to all school leaders.

**Mentoring.** Alongside a positive support system, some teachers, especially teachers new to the profession, will need a mentor (McLaurin, Smith, & Smillie, 2009). In previous components, adequate professional development opportunities were mentioned, and this mentoring is an extension of professional development with new

teachers (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly). New teachers need a variety of components to their support systems because teaching is new to them. As such, the stresses of the job can become overwhelming and if they have an extra layer of support, they will have an easier time making it through the challenges than if they did not have that extra layer of support. School leaders are again a large piece of making sure the mentor program operates efficiently and effectively on each campus. It shows that teachers with strong support systems are more likely to stay in their positions while teachers with weak support systems tend to leave for other jobs.

**Relationships.** One condition that is brought up consistently is relationships. For school climate, it will not be any different as building relationships is another key condition that influences school climate (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). School leaders must work to build trust with teachers so that an environment of respect is present and rapport is created between principal and teacher. Collaboration between school leaders and teachers is also important because purposeful opportunities should be present for discussion between school leaders and teachers. These opportunities for discussion and collaboration will positively influence school climate, which will in turn help to retain teachers.

**Student behavior.** Another condition that influences teachers' decisions to resign from their jobs is student behavior and school discipline (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). School leaders must make sure that an effective school-wide discipline program exists and that it is clearly communicated to parents, students, and teachers. If teachers do not feel supported when they face challenges with

student discipline, then they will leave to seek jobs elsewhere in hopes that this situation will change at their new jobs.

**Facilities and safety.** When examining teacher retention, researchers have established that teachers are concerned with their workspace on campus as well as the resources available to them (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). The appearance of the school can affect morale and the environment for staff members and students, so the school leader must generate and implement a plan to make sure the school is presentable and well maintained at all times. In addition to the facilities, teachers also want to make sure they have adequate resources to create the quality lessons that are asked of them. Alongside facilities, is school safety as a component that influences school climate. A positive and safe working environment need to be present for all staff members and students because it is important to feel comfortable in a workspace. The district and school leaders also need to have a plan in place and emergency operation procedures in place to protect teachers and students from any violence or danger. These components contribute to school climate, which in turn affect teacher retention.

**Urban schools.** Although many schools and school districts experience teacher retention problems, it is particular different in urban or hard-to-staff schools. Urban schools that serve low-income, minority students do not typically meet with the same success when compared to a school without this description (Towns, Cole-Henderson, & Serpell, 2002). Because of these statistics, some teachers may choose to leave an urban school to go to a neighboring school district with different economic levels. However, if the right principal is employed, then less of a chance would exist for losing teachers to

other school districts. Urban area schools that have strong leadership, high expectations of students and teachers, monitor students' academic progress, effective discipline management system, teamwork and collaboration, and parent and community involvement will achieve alongside other schools that do not have the same description. Urban schools that serve low-income children need principals who do not make excuses or let "barriers" get in their way of making sure all children receive a quality education. The placement of an effective principal in an urban setting is of utmost importance if the school is going to achieve well academically and is going to retain effective teachers from year to year. Although challenges are present that not every school faces and while it may be harder to retain teachers in an urban setting, it is possible with the placement of an effective principal that has the qualities listed above. Without this, the school will experience high attrition rates.

### **Summary**

Within the review of literature, several different aspects of teacher retention were examined including good schools, good school administrators, school turnaround, leadership styles, good leadership, good teachers, and teacher retention. In Chapter III, the research design and methodology used will be discussed along with the details in regard to the focus groups conducted.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to determine the conditions that contributed to teacher attrition as well as conditions that could be addressed to increase the retention of teachers. If schools are able to retain their most effective teachers, this retention will, in turn, affect student achievement. Without certain things in place such as a good culture and climate, schools will lose some of the best teachers (Williams & Kritsonis, 2007). It is inevitable that teacher turnover will occur from year to year due to promotions, retirement, or employee relocation. Conditions are present that schools are able to influence and conditions also exist over which schools have little to no control. Promotions, retirement, and relocation are conditions that schools and school districts do not have much control over from year to year.

Life events will occur that will influence the teacher retention rate of schools and school districts. Other conditions such as job dissatisfaction due to things that occur from the school district or at the campus level are the conditions that can be influenced by district and campus leadership. These conditions are the ones that were addressed in this study. In this study, the focus was placed on teachers who made a lateral move from one district to another local school district. Not a focus of this investigation were teachers who left their current positions in any other type of situation. As such, the emphasis was placed solely on teachers who made laterally moves locally and the conditions that contributed to these moves. In addition to the conditions that contributed to their decisions to make lateral moves, changes that could be made by school districts and schools to retain teachers were examined.

According to Good and Bennett (2006), attrition rates are growing, so what are district leaders and school leaders doing to combat growing attrition rates? Researchers have documented that leaders have implemented some ideas to retain teachers; however, schools are still facing the same issues, retaining teachers from year to year. Teacher retention remains a vital concern for many school districts across the country and even across the world. Although research has been conducted in regard to retaining teachers, it still remains a problem. Accordingly, this study served an important purpose with additional research in efforts to assist with retaining more teachers. The literature for the literature review consisted of journal articles and reports from ERIC, Educational Resources Information Center, and JSTOR, Journal Storage, accessed through the University of Houston Libraries webpage. In addition to journal articles and reports from these databases, books from previous coursework that were relevant to the study were utilized. It is with these sources that a literature was constructed to support the study.

### **Research Questions**

In the first research question, the reasons why teachers resign from an urban school district and accept a teaching position in another local school district were addressed. In the second set of questions, the focus was on what schools and school districts need to do to retain their teachers. The research questions guided the investigator to determine why teachers make lateral moves as well as what schools and school districts can do to address the contributing conditions. The following questions guided the study.

### Research Question One

What are the conditions that contribute to attrition within the district?

- A. What attributes or conditions influenced the choices to apply, interview, and accept a teaching position within Urban ISD?
- B. Describe how the following had a positive or undesirable influence on educators and their teaching.
  - a. Urban ISD
  - b. Individual Campus
  - c. Urban ISD staff members (district level personnel, campus staff members, administrators, counselors, other teachers)
- C. Explain the levels of support received at the district level, campus level, and department level.
- D. What are the conditions that contributed to leaving Urban ISD after interviewing for a teaching position in another Texas School District?
- E. What are the reason(s) for seeking a lateral move outside of Urban ISD?

### Research Question Two

How can these conditions be addressed to retain teachers?

- A. What could be done to retain Urban ISD's current teachers?

### **Description of Research Design**

To answer all research questions listed above, a research design was utilized that was most appropriate for the study. The most appropriate design for this study was a qualitative research approach and, more specifically, a basic interpretive qualitative study



(Merriam, 2002). With a basic interpretive qualitative study, the researcher was able to use interviews to uncover the perspective of teachers who made lateral moves from one school district to other local school districts. Participant responses were analyzed to uncover common themes among responses. A qualitative approach was most appropriate for the study in contrast to a quantitative approach to the study. The purpose of the study was to uncover the contributing conditions to the inability of schools to retain teachers as well as what schools can do to retain their teachers from year to year. This type of study needed descriptive responses to gain the answers required to answer the research questions. Descriptive responses from participants were gained through a qualitative approach as use of a survey to quantify the data would not allow for in depth responses and could possibly lead to missing data. With missing data, the answers to the research questions would not be complete and therefore not viable data. Efforts were made to collect all responses from participants and not partial responses or even responses that could be used on a numerical scale. This type of approach would have eliminated detailed and descriptive answers, which would in turn alter the validity of the responses to answer the research questions. To capture all details in every response from every participant, the basic interpretive qualitative study was the most appropriate and effective choice to serve the overall purpose of the study.

### **Setting**

This study took place in Urban ISD. Urban ISD is a Title I district, and according to the Texas Academic Performance Report for from the 2015-2016 school year, 88.3% of the students in the district are classified as economically disadvantaged. The district is

comprised of approximately 70,000 students. Below is a table that displays the breakdown of the student population within Urban ISD.

Table 1

*Student Information*

Total Students: 70,277

	Enrollment	Percent
Student Information	70,277	100%
African American	16,743	23.8%
Hispanic	50,634	72.0%
White	1,355	1.9%
American Indian	116	0.2%
Asian	891	1.3%
Pacific Islander	90	0.1%
Two or more Races	448	0.6%
Economically Disadvantaged	62,081	88.3%
English Language Learners	23,876	34%
At-Risk	45,809	65.2%

*Note:* The student information was retrieved from the 2015-2016 TAPR Report and represents the breakdown of student demographics within the district. The teachers that will participate in the focus group are comprised of people who were once teachers in Urban ISD and resigned to accept a lateral move in another local school district.

Apart from examining student information from Urban ISD, the table below represents the information breakdown for teachers employed in Urban ISD for the 2015-2016 school year.

Table 2

*Teacher Information*

Total Teachers: 4,439.3

	Total	Percent
Teacher Information	4,439.3	100%
African American	1,824.2	41.1%
Hispanic	1,071.3	24.1%
White	1,359.5	30.6%
American Indian	15.6	0.4%
Asian	103.5	2.3%
Pacific Islander	4.8	0.1%
Two or More Races	60.5	1.4%
Males	1,050.5	23.7%
Females	3,388.8	76.3%

Note: This table represents the current teacher information breakdown from Urban ISD from the 2015-2016 TAPR Report from the TEA website. Dependent upon when the teacher resigned from the district, it is possible that some of the focus group participants will also be included in the teacher information section of the TAPR report.

Apart from examining student information and staff information breakdown for Urban ISD, it is also important to examine the information in relation to the percentage of teachers by years of experience with the district. Because retaining teachers from making lateral and local moves was the centerpiece of the study, it is important to examine years of experience teachers have within the district. In this investigation, a veteran teacher

with multiple years of experience may not have spent all of their years within Urban ISD, but it will offer a glimpse of the experience teachers have within Urban ISD.

Table 3

*Teaching Experience Information*

Total Teachers: 4,439.3

	Total	Percent
Teachers by Years of Experience	4,439.3	100%
Beginning Teachers	580.6	13.1%
1-5 Years Experience	1,551.7	35.0%
6-10 Years Experience	917.3	20.7%
11-20 Years Experience	846.1	19.1%
Over 20 Years Experience	543.6	12.2%

*Note:* The information was retrieved from the 2015-2016 TAPR Report on the TEA website.

The three tables listed above help to describe student information as well as teacher information from the most recent completed school year. These descriptions provide a global picture of the district in which the focus group took place. In addition to the global perspective of the school district information provided, the setting of the focus groups was held at one of the schools in Urban ISD. Approval to hold the focus groups was obtained by Urban ISD as well as the IRB (Institutional Review Board) at the University of Houston. The focus groups were held on a day where no staff or students were present so as not to compromise confidentiality and the integrity of the time spent in the focus groups.

## **Participants**

To answer the primary research questions previously listed, interactions needed to occur with the teachers who made lateral and local moves from Urban ISD. Before the focus groups took place, participants were first selected. All participants fit the criteria prior to being selected for the study. The criteria to participate in the study included: participants were adults, 18 years of age or above but not to exceed 64 years of age, must have currently been a teacher in another Texas school district, must have been a teacher in Urban ISD, and lastly, all participants must have resigned from Urban ISD to accept a teaching job in another Texas school district. Possible participants were excluded if they were teachers who had never taught in Urban ISD or if they were teachers in Urban ISD but resigned due to retirement, promotion, or relocation. The principal researcher used knowledge of teachers for selection. The principal researcher had come in contact with each participant in a professional setting within Urban ISD over the past 10 years.

An e-mail to recruit was sent to all prospective participants with details about the time commitment and what their parts in the study would entail. After the e-mail, possible participants received a follow-up phone call to answer questions the possible participants had in relation to the study. Once teachers responded back with interest in participating in the focus group, the consent form was provided beforehand. If a teacher had a question about the consent form, the primary researcher was willing to set up a time to speak to him/her over the phone and in person if requested by the teacher. Potential participants' contact information was retrieved through prior professional relationships with the principal researcher. All participation was voluntary and teachers' names were kept confidential throughout the entire process.

## **Procedures and Data Collection**

To answer the research questions, a focus group was conducted with the selected participants after IRB and district approval was obtained. After the potential participants were contacted with e-mail for recruitment and interested candidates responded, the principal researcher ensured that all questions were answered in relation to participation in the study and was available by phone or in person if the candidate preferred this type of communication. Potential participants also received a copy of the consent form to review prior to participating in the focus group. Ten participants were selected from the potential participant pool based off of scheduling and availability. Ten participants were chosen for the study because this number of teachers was adequate enough to gain a variety of perspectives from the questions but also kept the group small enough remain focused, and make sure participants were comfortable in their setting to answer the questions honestly.

Once the 10 participants were chosen, the researcher began to schedule either one date for one focus group of 10 people or schedule two dates for two different focus groups with the same set of questions. The participants' schedules allotted for two focus groups. One focus group was comprised of six participants while the other focus group was comprised of four participants. After the dates were determined, the primary researcher made sure by way of phone, e-mail, or in person, that participants had no additional questions regarding the consent form that was sent previously or questions about the study. After the focus groups were scheduled and all questions of participants answered, the primary researcher ensured that the conference room at the school in Urban ISD was reserved for the selected dates. On the day of the focus group, the primary

researcher arrived early to ensure that copies of the consent form were available to sign for each participant as well as badges that were numbered 1 through 10 assigned to participants randomly to ensure their confidentiality. A recording device was used for audio recording and was set in the center of the conference room table at the school in Urban ISD. When focus group participants arrived, they checked in with the researcher at the front door of the school and received their assigned badges with their numbers. Once participants arrived, they were not referred to by their names but their assigned badge numbers to ensure confidentiality. When all participants arrived, the focus group began in the conference room. Prior to asking the approved questions, the researcher provided a copy of the consent form to participate in the study as well as their agreement to be audio recorded. After the consent forms were signed and collected, the researcher explained the process of the focus group.

The researcher asked the questions, and the participants answered the questions in the order of their badge numbers. If any participant did not feel comfortable answering a question or part of a question, they were told that they did not have to answer it. The questions were asked, answered by the participants, and audio recorded. Participants were asked 11 questions. These 11 questions were selected to ensure the ability to answer the primary research questions of the study. After all 11 questions were asked and answered by each participant of the focus group, the audio recording ended and the participants were free to leave. The participants received no compensation or incentive for participating in the study. It was strictly on a voluntary basis after meeting all criteria. The audio recording from the focus groups were kept electronically and password protected. The consent forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet to ensure

confidentiality. The focus group participants were not required to attend any further sessions only one-session lasting approximately one to two hours. Once the time commitment was fulfilled, no additional time was required.

### **Instrumentation**

To answer the proposed research questions, the questioning style used during the focus group was completely open ended to allow participants to explain their answers without being limited by constraints of survey rankings or multiple-choice responses. The participants needed to be allowed the opportunity to elaborate and explain their thought processes in their decisions to resign from Urban ISD. Questions were formatted to be open-ended for all questions. The 11 focus group questions were based off of the primary research questions to ensure that the research questions were adequately answered. A peer reviewed the questions to ensure they were appropriate for the study and that they aimed to answer the research questions. Any recommendations that were made to alter questions based off of feedback from a peer were taken under consideration and revisited. Experts and the IRB committee for the University of Houston as well as Urban ISD also critiqued the questions. Recommendations and suggestions for changes were taken into account from these entities as well. It is with these methods that the primary researcher ensured the focus group questions were most effective for the study.

### **Data Analysis**

When the focus group was completed and all data were collected, the data analysis process began. The audio recording was transcribed with all information that was pertinent to the research questions. Any responses that were not relevant to the study remained on the audio recording but were not included in the transcription. This detail



was added into the IRB application. A colleague was also added into IRB for approval and assisted in completing the transcription of the audio recording from the focus groups. This process ensured the validity and reliability of the transcription prior to the analysis process. The data were then analyzed for common themes among participants related to the research questions. These common themes were then isolated and data re-examined to make sure all responses related to the common theme were accounted for in the initial analysis.

Once the primary researcher identified common themes among responses, a peer review/examination occurred to ensure validity and reliability of the data results (Merriam and Associates, 2002). The primary researcher and the peer examiner met after the peer examination and compared findings and discussed remaining differentiation. This process continued until the peer examiner and primary researcher agreed on common themes derived from responses of participants during the focus group. Another method that was used to ensure validity and reliability of the data was the researcher's position of reflexivity. Because the researcher has professional relationships with the participants, the researcher had to self-reflect consistently over the course of the analysis process and recognize any bias the researcher held because of these professional relationships. This method of self-reflection was a vital piece to ensure valid and reliable data.

### **Limitations**

Although methods and measures were present to create a quality basic comparative qualitative study, limitations were present that must be recognized (Merriam & Associates, 2002). One limitation was that the participants were chosen based off of

convenience of the professional interactions with the primary researcher. The participants may have not felt as open to express certain views and perspectives due to the professional relationship previously held with the primary researcher. Because of this, some responses may not include all perspectives and views of the participant and could possibly be censored. However, the professional relationship may in turn have made the participants feel more open to discuss their true feelings and views for each question. A level of trust was present that would otherwise not be present if the researcher did not have an existing relationship with the participants. In addition to the possible censorship of answers, limitations were also present with respect to the small pool of possible participants to select from versus other studies. The possibility of becoming a participant in the focus group was limited to only people who have held some type of professional relationship with the primary researcher. This limitation prevented other teachers who met the criteria from being selected to participate in the focus group. Although selection was limited, the people who met the criteria also came from diverse backgrounds, which enabled the researcher to receive different points of views to answer the primary research questions. Lastly, the 11 questions that were asked have not been used in a previous study. However, through peer review/examination, the questions aligned with the purpose and research questions of the study.

### **Summary**

The study that was conducted is a basic interpretative qualitative investigation in which teacher retention in Urban ISD was examined. Not focused upon were all of the reasons teachers resign from Urban ISD but, rather, more specifically on teachers who resigned from the district to accept a teaching position in another Texas school district.

Reasons for resigning such as retirement, promotions, and relocations were not examined, only lateral moves. A focus group was held to find common themes in responses and answer the primary research questions. In Chapter IV, results will be discussed from the data that were analyzed from the focus group and common themes that were obtained, in response to the research questions.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

This investigation was a qualitative study in which focus groups were conducted to ascertain information about teacher retention in Urban ISD. Participants of the focus groups were all teachers who had previously been employed as a teacher in Urban ISD and who had made a lateral move from the Urban ISD to another Texas school district. As previously stated, specifically examined in this qualitative investigation were effective teachers who made lateral moves. Teachers who resigned for reasons such as promotions, relocation, or retirement were excluded from the participant pool. Two focus groups were conducted with the first one comprised of six participants and the second one comprised of four participants. All 10 participants were asked the same eleven questions, and the session were audio recorded. The 11 questions assisted in determining the answers to the research questions for the study. The audio recordings were transcribed and data analyzed to find emerging themes from the responses, for it is with these emerging themes that the proposed research questions were answered.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine the reasons why teachers left an urban school district and what things could be implemented to reduce the attrition rate. District and school leaders wish to retain their high quality, effective teachers from year to year because they know that retaining teachers will have a positive influence on student achievement just as not retaining teachers will have a negative influence on student achievement (McLaurin et al., 2009). Student achievement is a top priority in schools

and school districts because this profession serves kids and their success. As such, their well-being should always be first.

To conduct the study, a focus group was formed and questions were asked about teachers' experiences in an urban school district as well as their reasons for choosing to make a lateral move to another Texas School District. The research design used in this investigation was a qualitative approach. Teachers met with the principal investigator one time for approximately two hours at a school in the urban area school district. The sample of teachers was a convenience sample for at one time or another, the principal investigator worked with the teachers in some capacity.

To obtain information that might assist in remediating the teacher retention problem within Urban ISD, research questions were created to guide the questions that were asked to the focus groups. The purpose of the study was to be able to offer possible solutions that school districts could implement to retain quality teachers from year to year. Teachers offered insight into the conditions that contributed to their decisions to seek a lateral move. Also, teachers shared conditions that if they were different, they would have remained employed as a teacher in Urban ISD.

### **Findings through Research Questions**

In the first research question, the reasons why teachers resign from an urban school district and accept a teaching position in another local school district were addressed. In the second set of questions, the focus was on what schools and school districts need to do to retain their teachers. The research questions guided the investigator to determine why teachers make lateral moves as well as what schools and school districts can do to address the contributing conditions. Conducting the focus

groups and analyzing participants' responses to identify emerging and common themes answered the following research questions.

**Research Question One: What are the conditions that contribute to attrition within the district?**

The participants had a variety of reasons for choosing to seek employment outside of Urban ISD, however, many of the responses given were similar to other participants' responses. This particular research question was answered by the responses to the questions listed below.

**What attributes or conditions influenced the choices to apply, interview, and accept a teaching position within Urban ISD?**

Participants spoke highly of the reputation that the district held among the community and through people they knew either already working in the district or had some type of ties to someone within the district. Because of this reputation, the participants sought employment with the district. One participant expressed, "I already had such high recommendations from everyone that I talked to, so I went on and applied in college and accepted my position in December and started working that January. I was so excited to be part of such a great district who'd been nationally recognized". Another reason for participants applying in Urban ISD was because they had attended schools in Urban ISD growing up and wanted to come back to the district they knew. Participants called this "homegrown". Two participants completed their student teaching in the district and because of their experiences in student teaching, decided to stay with the district when they graduated. Another two participants expressed the difficulty in finding a job with an alternative certification and felt that Urban ISD was one of the few districts

that were willing to give this type of applicant a chance at a teaching position. One participant shared, “They definitely were one of the only ones at that time that were doing that (accepting alternative certification candidates). That was a huge diving thing for me to be in Urban ISD”. Participants had a variety of journeys to becoming a teacher in Urban ISD, but the overall image among most people was that of a positive image and one in which the district gave chances to promising candidates which was not the same for all districts.

**Describe how the following had a positive or undesirable influence on educators and their teaching (Urban ISD, Individual Campus, Urban ISD staff members {district level personnel, campus staff members, administrators, counselors, other teachers}).**

First, responses for a positive influence on educators and their teaching will be shared. With this question, all participants shared a common response, staff developments and trainings. Every participant expressed the positive influence that staff developments and trainings within Urban ISD had on them and still to this day have on them. They felt that all staff development sessions prepared teachers well for content and management of the classroom. Participants also expressed that compared to their current districts, Urban ISD trains their teachers much better and provides more resources to their teachers hands down when compared to other districts. One participant shared, “Well, something that really was a positive impact from Urban ISD is the opportunities that they give you for the staff development and how you can attend any subject. You can attend all of those and they’re all free. That’s something that if you took advantage of, that it defiantly would help you as an educator”. Another participant shared, “...for Urban ISD, the staff development that you were able to attend, it really did teach you how to teach

kids at any level, things that we took for granted or things that I took for granted”. With the immaculate training, other districts look at teachers from Urban ISD as great candidates because they are trained beyond their current teachers.

In addition to impeccable training, Urban ISD also has varying levels of support. Participants expressed that they always felt there was someone they could go and talk to that would offer support and answers to their questions. Even if there was not someone on a particular campus who knew the answer to a question, district level directors were present who could offer support to teachers when needed. Another positive influence of Urban ISD was the professional relationships made while working in the district. Many opportunities were present for collaboration and participants said they still speak to people from the district to this day. Participants felt after working in Urban ISD that they were well prepared and knew what it took to be an effective classroom teacher.

In addition to positive influences shared, negative influences were also present on themselves as educators and on their teaching that were shared among the participants. One negative influence that all participants shared was the blanket statements made to all teachers by the principals. Instead of addressing teachers who were not following the rules and expectations of the campus and district, principals would take the opportunity to say it to everybody. A participant shared, “I would think of what I would see often is like a blanket statement of, ‘Okay, we need to stop yelling at the kids or cursing in our rooms’, and teachers would just sit there. Then I remember at one time when they said that and then the principal ended up her speech and I was like, ‘You know she’s talking about you, right?’ She’s like, ‘What?’ I turned and said, ‘Yes, she was in my room observing the other day and you were just yelling and we could hear you and like all of



my kids turned in the direction of your classroom'... There could be a lot more productive conversations that could be held with administration and those specific teachers. Not everyone has to suffer because of one or two apples in the bunch". In addition to making blanket statements, some participants felt that the principal would correct the good teachers because they knew they cared and would fix it while avoiding conversations with the less effective teachers because they felt changes would not occur. One participant shared, "So from the eye of other teachers it looked like they were always harping on the good teachers and then just letting the mediocre teachers get by with doing whatever and that created a lot of tension". These types of feelings influenced the way teachers felt about their jobs and how they performed in the classroom. A more severe consequence of these feelings is that they had a negative influence on teachers, which in turn contributed to them leaving the district.

In addition to this condition, some of the participants shared a dislike for the negativity amongst teachers and the unprofessionalism seen on the campus. A participant shared, "I think that teaching adults to be professional is something that's important and needed and that was something I did not see at my campus". Participants shared that this negativity and unprofessionalism left unaddressed and unchanged affected the school culture and their daily work environment. Another condition that negatively influenced the participants was the overall climate of the schools. One thing affecting the climate was the feeling of lack of support from the principal in regard to disciplining students. One participant shared, "It's like you would put up with as much as you could in your classroom because it didn't really matter what was going to happen in the principal's office. If you sent them, they'd usually come back 10 minutes later with a prize. It

doesn't make sense to me". Other participants shared other concerns such as a principal having favorite students and not supporting the teachers when the favorite students were in trouble. Another condition was the implementation of the teacher appraisal system based on the appraiser. Most participants had a good experience with the evaluation tool itself but not as positive of an experience with their appraiser. Many participants felt it was used as a "gotcha" tool versus a support tool as it is intended as well as appraisers having "favorites" and scoring them differently even if they don't deserve the assigned scores based off of the rubrics. Many participants did not feel supported or appreciated when it came to their efforts in the classroom and with students.

**Explain the levels of support received at the district level, campus level, and department level.**

With this question, participants brought up the staff development sessions again with positive recollections of all trainings attended. One participant shared, "Yes, I still look at books from my staff development sessions. I think that was one of the takeaways. In my new district you don't get the book or meet the person who wrote the book. In Urban ISD, you got a composition book, you got the textbook, and you met the person that wrote the book". All participants mentioned the staff development support again during this question. The content support that Urban ISD provides was better when compared to their current school districts. Along with staff developments, teachers were given materials to keep and were able to sign up for staff developments outside of the district free of charge to them if the paperwork was taken care of in advance. Agencies were also hired to come in and help teachers at the campus level in addition to district staff development sessions. At the campus level, department chairs, skills specialists and

mentors were a support system for the participants. More than half of the participants commended the district on implementing professional learning communities and setting aside separate time from conference periods to collaborate with other teachers as well as the department chairs or skills specialists. One participant stated, “I never felt overwhelmed with content. I never felt overwhelmed by the curriculum. I always felt that I knew what I needed to teach and how I could teach it in a variety of ways”. Content support through the district staff developments, program directors, department chairs, and skills specialists were present for all participants. The participants spoke about how much these types of supports have benefited them now in their current positions. The participants did not mention their principals or administrators being part of that support they received from others.

#### **What are the reason(s) for seeking a lateral move outside of Urban ISD?**

For this particular question, the participants opened up and shared the impact of the earlier concerns mentioned had on them in their personal lives as well as professional lives. Many participants said that the negativity from work started affected their home life, and they knew at that point, a change was necessary. One participant shared, “I’m a very positive person, and I consider myself to be optimistic and I was a negative Nancy, like everything, just my job in general. I became one of the complainers”. Another participant shared, “It’s exhausting to carry the emotional baggage for everyone and you’re trying to maintain positivity in a meeting and PLC and trying to stay on the agenda and not complaining about all the stuff that’s going wrong. But instead of complaining and coming up with a solution, and that’s what drove me nuts. I found myself not coming up with solutions but starting to be a part of the complaining. I felt

miserable because it wasn't me". These were just two of the concerns that the participants shared as to why they began seeking other teaching opportunities. Multiple participants shared that their decisions to make a lateral move did not have anything to do with the kids. Although challenges might have been present, they said one of the hardest parts about leaving the district was leaving the kids. The participants became the negative teachers they used to despise and no longer felt motivated to come to work. It was for these reasons that participants finally felt it was time to look elsewhere for a teaching position because they did not like the teachers they had become.

**What are the conditions that contributed to leaving Urban ISD after interviewing for a teaching position in another Texas School District?**

During this particular question, participants shared a lot about how they were welcomed by all staff members when they went to interview at other schools as well as their connection and belief in the building principal they were interviewing with at the time. One participant shared, "How personable the school was that I interviewed at, starting with the principal. Actually no, starting while I was waiting out in the hallway for the principal. Just sitting there, I had about three teachers come up and say, 'Hi, who are you? What are you here for?' Sat down with me and chatted about the school and asked me questions about myself". This welcoming experience with the staff members and the principal made this participant's decision to leave an easier one than expected. In addition to a welcoming environment, participants described feeling a connection with the principals and/or department chairs during the interview process. The participants believed the new schools when the principals explained the levels of support they would receive and participants experienced the climate for the short amount of time they were in

the schools. Another condition participants looked for was the salary amount and distance from home. Participants did not want to lose money by switching jobs and did not want to commute much further than they were already commuting. These two were conditions that could be examined prior to applying to jobs while the other conditions mentioned earlier could not be examined until the interview process. Some participants ended up taking pay cuts and driving longer even though that was not initially desired. Although money and commute were mentioned as a contributing condition, participants felt that the most important condition was a positive climate and a good fit with the principal and department chair.

**Research Question Two: How can these conditions be addressed to retain teachers?**

After asking several questions to the focus groups that centered around the reasons and conditions that attributed to the participants resigning from Urban ISD, the focus changed to how the district could have retained them as teachers as well as their current teachers. It is not only a critical piece of information to examine what went wrong, but also it is equally as critical to examine what could possibly make it better in regard to teacher retention.

**What could be done to retain Urban ISD's current teachers?**

When participants were asked to reflect and give ideas as to how Urban ISD could have retained them as teachers as well as their current teachers, one common theme was present among the responses: recognition and appreciation. Participants did not feel they were recognized for things they did well at the campus level by their principals nor did they feel appreciated for all their hard work by their principals. One participant shared, "Yes, of course, obviously, as teachers, we love to see our kids be successful and for us

that's enough. You are so proud of your students. But I feel like someone could have just recognized the teacher more than just pay because that's a new thing they are doing now". The participants did not desire monetary rewards as a condition that would keep them as teachers, but they did desire more recognition from principals and administrators to acknowledge the job they are doing with the students. Another participant shared, "I think too what participant one said about work recognition. If you have teachers who are busting their butts and who always show up on time, who are always where they're supposed to be, when they're supposed to be, their scores are constantly going up, I think give them recognition for what they do.

Apart from recognition, a few participants felt that they had no opportunities for promotions in their positions in Urban ISD. Some participants felt they had no chance of a promotion within their schools. A participant expressed, "...Maybe a better chance at some kind of promotion. I was at my school for six years. Never was I considered for department chair or skills specialist or anything". A few participants had a desire to be considered for promotions but felt they were never given the opportunity to do so. Another consideration participants brought up was principals asking for feedback before it is too late. Many of the participants would have been willing to stay had someone simply asked for feedback of how to make the school better. Many times the participants were not asked about why they wanted to leave or were unhappy until their exit interview with the district, and at that point, it was too late. One participant shared, "I think that the district could encourage principals to listen to what the teachers want a little more". Another participant shared, "Ask me why I'm leaving and then take that to heart and try to change it. No one really sat down and said, 'What's up? What's on your mind?'

...That just really bothered me. No one fought for me. No one did anything, they were just like, 'Oh you want to leave, there's the door', and that's exactly how I felt". These comments go back to feeling recognized and valued for what they are doing, and if they are trying to resign, then the principal making the effort to try and retain the teacher versus no communication at all. Although most participants felt the exit interview was too late at that point for them, participants also felt that the exit interview might not be confidential and therefore did not want to be honest in their responses or did not participate in the exit interview process at all. These were the common themes among responses for how to retain them as well as other people as teachers in Urban ISD.

### **Analysis of the Data**

When analyzing the participants' responses from the two focus groups, themes emerged from the data analysis. With these emerging themes, some themes involved activities that Urban ISD should continue to do, whereas other themes were areas the district could examine for improvement in retaining teachers. The first emerging themes (i.e., staff development, content support, and teacher preparation) were perceived as what Urban ISD should continue doing as they were the positive influences on the participants. The second set of emerging themes (i.e., teacher recognition, communication, school climate, and the role of the principal) were considered to have negative influences on the participants.

**Staff development.** All participants highly praised Urban ISD for the staff development opportunities provided for teachers. Participants fondly remembered the district even paying for outside staff development if the teacher wanted to attend, and as a result, the participants were part of a variety of staff developments that they still use to

this day in their classrooms. Not only were the participants exposed to a variety of beneficial staff development sessions, they were also given materials and books to take back to their classrooms and implement with their students. Participants expressed how this situation was not the same in their current districts and that many teachers in their current districts look to them for those same materials they received years ago in a staff development in Urban ISD.

**Content support.** The content support offered in Urban ISD has a variety of levels, the district, campus, and department levels. Participants expressed great appreciation for the ability to always have someone to turn to concerning the content they taught. District level program directors were available to answer questions from teachers and were present to support them in their content. Apart from district level program directors, campus and department level supports were present, including department chairs and skills specialists. The district created a professional learning community time during the school day to allow department chairs and skills specialists to meet with their teams. This time allowed for extensive content support for the teachers. Participants were grateful for the opportunity to know what they were teaching and what materials they were going to use even as a novice teacher.

**Teacher preparation.** With respect to teacher preparation, the participants felt that Urban ISD prepared them for any type of situation and to work with a diverse group of students successfully. The participants felt that it was because of Urban ISD that they were prepared for any other district and another other teaching position, and participants also shared that other school districts in the interviewing process pretty much gave teachers the job if they heard they were from Urban ISD because they knew they were



knowledgeable and prepared. Being a teacher from Urban ISD gave the participants an advantage over other applicants, and the participants expressed how they were further along in content advancements having come from Urban ISD.

**Teacher recognition.** Though many positive things were noted about Urban ISD, some negative things were present that drove the participants away from remaining in Urban ISD. The first emerging theme is teacher recognition. All participants communicated their dissatisfaction with the lack of recognition from their principals. The participants many times felt unappreciated for the job they were doing due to the lack of recognition from their principals. This lack of recognition resulted in teacher burnout and negativity that eventually led to resignation. Participants did not expect much for recognition but just wanted to be told they had done a good job and were appreciated. Monetary recognition was not a desire of the participants, as they wanted to recognition from their principals. They wanted to know that their hard work did not go unnoticed.

**Communication.** In addition to teacher recognition, the participants also wanted better communication with their principals. The participants were never asked what they thought or when principals knew they were leaving and no conversation occurred regarding what would make them stay. Before ever asking what would make the participants stay in Urban ISD, little to no conversation transpired about any problems the participants were having on the campus. At most, surveys were sent out, however, principals would tend to get upset about some of the feedback and then change little to nothing the next semester or school year. The participants wanted to feel valued and

communicated with on what was going wrong in the school and the efforts that would need to be taken to improve it.

**School climate.** From the lack of accountability for mediocre teachers to the blanket statements made in whole group, school climate was an issue for most participants. Participants would see favoritism of staff members from the principal as well as favoritism of students from the principal, and both of these contributed to a negative climate within the school. Contributing to school climate is also teacher recognition and communication. Both of these play a part in developing a school climate in which teachers would want to work. The participants expressed that their breaking points were when they became the negative teachers they once despised and dreaded coming to work. These types of feelings as discussed in the literature review are symptoms of a poor school climate, which is cultivated by the principal.

**The role of the principal.** The last emerging theme that will be discussed is the most critical emerging theme as all three other emerging themes listed above tie into the role of the principal. If the principal is unable to create an environment where teachers are recognized for their hard work, where they communicated effectively with their staff members, and where they foster a positive school climate, then that principal will not be able to retain teachers. Teachers are leaving because of these conditions, which are all put in place, by the building principal. When participants were looking for other jobs, they were examining the principal and the school climate. The participants knew from their previous experience that these were important conditions when finding a new school home. The effectiveness of the principal is the critical piece for Urban ISD's teacher retention efforts. If principals could be more effective in the emerging themes discussed

above, then more teachers would stay in Urban ISD. The participants desired support, respect, communication, and accountability from all from their principals. All participants perceived a downfall in their experience in Urban ISD with their principals. The role of the principal and how effective that principal is in recognizing teachers, communicating with teachers, and fostering a positive school climate is a critical piece of what school districts can do to retain their teachers.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, the most critical piece to teacher retention is the principal. Participants in the focus groups had many important pieces of information to offer, however, all pieces of information tied back to the role of the principal. If a campus has an effective principal, then that particular campus will have a better chance of retaining their teachers versus a campus that has an ineffective or mediocre principal. The influence of the principal goes far beyond his/her office door. It is of utmost importance for school districts to examine the role of the principal and how they can train their principals to be effective leaders in order to retain their effective teachers. In Chapter V, recommendations for future research will be examined with a summary of findings.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

#### **Overview of Study**

In this study, conditions that contributed to effective teachers' resignations from one urban school district to another local school district were examined for common themes among focus group responses. Through the focus group responses, common themes were identified. By identifying common themes, the principal investigator was able to determine conditions that could lead to effective teacher resignations. With this type of information, schools and school districts will be able to address the conditions prior to teachers making the choice to resign from their current roles. Schools and school districts will in turn have a greater opportunity of retaining effective teachers. In addition to conditions that influenced teachers' decisions to resign, also examined were conditions that could have been implemented by the urban school district to retain teachers prior to their resignations. Common themes were also identified from responses to focus group questions concerning programs and/or strategies that could have been implemented or put in place to retain participants as teachers. With this information, schools and school districts can implement some or all of these methods to retain teachers prior to them making the final decision to resign and begin job searches in other districts.

Teacher retention within a school, district, and within the profession in general has been relevant for many years. Brief moments of budget cuts have occurred where this situation was not the case, however, for the most part, more jobs are available than are highly qualified teachers. This situation can be devastating when a school or school district is not able to retain its teachers. As a school leader, one of the most important

things that must occur is to keep teachers from year to year (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). A variety of policies and procedures are present that every district and school leader must evaluate from year to year; however, the focus in the summer tends to be on filling vacant positions and not necessarily why those positions need to be filled in the first place. The policies and procedures that are evaluated from year to year will have difficulty withstanding new teachers coming in every year, for the policies and procedures will not become fluid and seamless if they have to be retaught every year (McLaurin, Smith, & Smillie, 2009). With re-teaching that must occur from year to year, teachers and the campus as a whole will have difficulties reaching higher standards due to the constant change. Just when policies and procedures might become successful and consistent, teachers resign and interrupt the fluidity of the procedures. According to Good and Bennett (2006), attrition rates are growing, so what are district leaders and school leaders doing to combat growing attrition rates? Documented in the research literature is that leaders have implemented some ideas to retain teachers; however, schools are still facing the same issues, retaining teachers from year to year.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine the reasons why teachers are leaving an urban school district and what strategies could be implemented to reduce the attrition rate. Also examined herein were conditions that contributed to teacher resignations and those that would sustain teachers in their current roles. District and school leaders wish to retain their high quality, effective teachers from year to year because they know that retaining teachers will have a positive influence on student achievement just as not retaining teachers will have a negative influence on student achievement (McLaurin et

al., 2009). Student achievement is a top priority in schools and school districts because this profession serves kids and their success. As such, their well-being should always be a top priority.

To conduct the study, a focus group was formed and questions were asked about teachers' experiences in an urban school district as well as their reasons for choosing to make a lateral move to another neighboring school district. Also included were questions that had the teachers explain what conditions if any could have been changed or altered to entice them to stay. The research design used in this investigation was a qualitative approach. Teachers met with the principal investigator one time for approximately two hours at a school in the urban school district. The sample of teachers was a convenience sample for at one time or another, the principal investigator worked with the teachers in some capacity. Teachers were selected who previously worked in the urban school district but then left the district for another teaching job in another neighboring school district.

### **Implications of Teacher Retention**

Once the audio recorded responses were transcribed, the data generated were analyzed for common themes among participants' responses. The common themes represent responses that were given by many to all of the participants when asked the designated eleven focus group questions. If common responses were present among participants, then these responses are ones that schools and school districts would be wise to pay close attention to if interested in retaining their quality teachers. From the data generated by audio recorded focus group responses, four common responses were noted that contributed to the participant's resignations, and if those things would have been

different, the participants shared that they would have stayed in the urban school district. This would imply that the urban school district had an opportunity to retain the focus group participants as teachers but were unable to because of the four common conditions shared among participants. The four common conditions are listed below.

**Teacher recognition.** All participants communicated their dissatisfaction with the lack of recognition from their principals. The participants many times felt unappreciated for the job they were doing due to the lack of recognition from their principals. This resulted in teacher burnout and negativity that eventually led to resignation. Participants did not expect much for recognition but just wanted to be told they had done a good job and were appreciated. Monetary recognition was not a desire of the participants, as they wanted to recognition from their principals. They wanted to know that their hard work did not go unnoticed.

Teacher recognition is a simple process that could be implemented into any school or school district. While it can be part of the job that goes unnoticed, school leaders must take a special interest in making sure teachers feel valued and appreciated for the work that they do. Many teachers want to know they are doing a good job with their students, and when they do not receive that recognition, they have the possibility of turning to negativity instead of taking the recognition and using that as a driving force to become better and better.

**Communication.** In addition to teacher recognition, participants also wanted better communication with their principals. The participants were never asked what they thought or when principals knew they were leaving, no conversation transpired regarding what would make them stay. For this particular component, little to no communication

was present between school leaders and teachers about concerns they had while still employed at the campus. Even when the teachers told the principals they were applying elsewhere for the next school year, many principals did not inquire about why or how they could prevent these teachers from applying elsewhere but simply wished them the best on their journey and they were sorry to see them go. For the participants, these behaviors gave the message of clearance to find a job elsewhere. However, if the conversation had taken a different direction to address why the teacher desired a move, a chance might have been present to retain the teacher. In this type of situation, communication is a critical point to examine.

**School climate.** From the lack of accountability for mediocre teachers to the blanket statements made in whole group, school climate was an issue for most participants. Participants would see favoritism of staff members from the principal as well as favoritism of students from the principal, and both of these contributed to a negative climate within the school. Teachers do not want to work in a school with a poor climate. As mentioned previously in the literature, many tasks and responsibilities exist that tire teachers out, but a negative school climate should not be one of them. Teachers' jobs are challenging enough and school climate should be one that is positive, welcoming, and collaborative. If a supportive school climate is not present, good teachers will leave and find somewhere that can provide a better school climate.

**The role of the principal.** The last emerging theme that will be discussed is the most critical emerging theme as all three other emerging themes listed above tie into the role of the principal. If the principal is unable to create an environment where teachers are recognized for their hard work, where they communicated effectively with their staff



members, and where they foster a positive school climate, then that principal will not be able to retain teachers. The principal is the centerpiece of everything in the school. Every decision made and procedure put in place is related to the principal, and if the principal is unable to carry these tasks out effectively, then quality teachers will leave every year. An ineffective principal will not be able to retain effective teachers. School districts must focus on the principal position and what candidates are placed in these critical positions as well as what type of training and monitoring will take place for beginning and veteran principals.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

When beginning this study, the questions created included a broad range of topics and conditions that could come up during the focus group. These questions were deliberately formed to make sure any possible conditions affecting decisions to resign were captured through the research questions and focus group questions. From those questions, one critical common theme was identified, the role of the principal. Because the role of the principal has a profound effect on teacher retention, researchers are encouraged to examine this role more closely. It is not simply enough to say principals play a critical role in retaining teachers, but it would be of great benefit to school districts to know more about the role and what can occur to foster an environment that will yield great principals. If additional research studies were conducted in this area, then the resulting information could also have a lasting influence on the retention of quality teachers.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, great schools with students who achieve at the highest level academically have great teachers in their classrooms. Teachers influence student achievement more than any other school component (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). As a result, it is most critical to put the best and most effective teachers in place at every school within a district. Once teachers are recruited and hired, the task then becomes retention. Schools and more importantly schools' number one stakeholders, students, will not achieve to the best of their abilities without the retention of quality teachers. Therefore, in order to make the best place for students to learn, school leaders must ensure retention of their effective teachers. Conditions were examined that would help lead to a better retention rate, and school districts need to take these into account in order to create a climate of success. Students need good teachers, and it is because of this need that teacher retention will always remain a topic of conversation in schools.

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**Appendix A**  
**IRB Approval**

UNIVERSITY of  
**HOUSTON**  
 DIVISION OF RESEARCH

Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

July 19, 2016

Ms. Lindsey Schoppe  
 Dr. Angus MacNeil  
 Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Dear Ms. Lindsey Schoppe,

The IRB has reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Expedited
Title of Study:	What Does It Take? Retention In An Urban Houston School District: A Focus Group Study With Teachers Who Left An Urban Houston School District And Accepted A Position In Another Texas District
Investigator:	Ms. Lindsey Schoppe
IRB ID:	8428 - 16531-01
IRB Coordinator:	Samoya Copeland

The IRB approved the study from:

- Approval Date: 7/18/2016
- Expiration Date: 7/17/2017

As required by federal regulations governing research in human subjects, research procedures (including recruitment, informed consent, intervention, data collection or data analysis) may not be conducted after the expiration date.

Sincerely,

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<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

cc: Faculty Sponsor