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**NOVICE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF WHAT LEADERSHIP CAN DO TO  
RETAIN TEACHERS**

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**by**

**Pilar Leigh Westbrook**

**Treatise**

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# **NOVICE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF WHAT LEADERSHIP CAN DO TO RETAIN TEACHERS**

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Addressing teacher turnover is costly regarding recruitment, training, and student learning loss to schools and taxpayers. Given such high costs and importance in the growth and stability in society, understanding novice teachers' perceptions about teacher attrition needs further investigation. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate what leadership methods and administrative supports are needed to retain novice teachers. There were three research questions: (a) What can principals/school leaders provide to support and retain teachers? (b) Do the leadership principles outlined by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) align with novice teacher job satisfaction enough to retain teachers? (c) What are the most important pillars of the leadership responsibility matrix as they pertain to perceptions of novice teachers about retention? The study was conducted through multiple focus groups and interviews with 13 novice teachers who had 0 to 3 years of experience working in a school district serving a high poverty, high minority student population of 12,000 students. Each research question was satisfied based on data collected and coded into themes that afforded a clear understanding of what novice teachers need to feel and be successful in teaching. The collective findings from the participants found the following themes as those most important to support and keep teachers: Coaching, Communication, Relationships, Cooperative Team Building, Resources, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) of

teachers, and Culture. The qualitative data suggest a loosely coupled relationship exists between needs of the novice teachers and the 21 responsibilities of school leaders. The predominant theme of coaching surfaced among the novice teacher participants. Findings from the study may be used by school districts to obtain a better understanding of modern leadership principles from the viewpoint of novice teachers. The findings suggest there are growth opportunities for school leaders to encourage, grow, and sustain teachers. The study concludes with recommendations for future research.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

Teachers are the cornerstone of education because they are the most critical factor in a student's education (Ravitch, 2010). The measurable impact of an effective teacher in a student's education is 3 years. Therefore, an instructor that consistently creates pupil growth can bring children beyond their expected grade level or fix deficits in grade level growth by up to three grades. However, an ineffective teacher can impose the reverse, causing a detrimental 3-year learning loss for a student (Ravitch, 2010). District and campus leaders who develop novice teachers' abilities, therefore, affect the overall progress of the students on their campuses.

Researchers have shown how school leaders play an essential role in keeping their instructors. Our educational system, and in turn school leadership, is the foundation for an instructional institutions overall culture and context. The leader is fundamental to teachers' successes as the primary conduit for training, collegiality, and overall support. Stable, supportive leadership offers opportunities for teachers to advance in their profession, earn higher pay for improved performance, and increase student success through teacher mentoring and professional development (Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012).

Teachers also support each other in reaching success with students. Mentor-to-mentee support has been shown to increase retention levels among novice teachers (Busteed, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Saliently, teacher retention correlates to overall student success. The correlation between student success and teacher retention is also dependent upon the teacher's knowledge of content and ability to successfully teach the material to students, while simultaneously offering a supportive, safe, and connected environment in which students can learn. Collective teacher knowledge is lost on a

campus when there is constant instructor turnover. The introduction of different teachers creates the need to revitalize the collective efficacy among teachers and leaders, with the reintroduction of each new educator (Bartolette & Connelly, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2003). Turnover destabilizes the foundations of our education system and without a solid understanding of its causal connections, increased resources, such as revenue, will not support better outcomes.

Teacher attrition results in student learning deficits, and novice replacement teachers are unable to compensate for those deficiencies. When effective instructors leave, students end up with knowledge loss due to a revolving door of new, novice teachers (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). Teacher attrition typically has a more substantial negative impact in schools with high poverty and high minority populations which compounds student learning deficits in low socioeconomic institutions that need to attract and maintain the best facilitators of learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Studies reveal student demographics affect teacher retention and cite schools with low socioeconomic characteristics as having few or ineffective resources. These resources can include a lack of experienced principals or campus administrators as well as inconsistent or inadequate standardized management plans for all systems due to constant turnover. Of note recent findings indicate schools with low socioeconomic characteristics, a higher percentage of teachers stay in the classroom relative specifically to race, ethnicity, or poverty. Teachers choose to stay in schools when they believe they will make a difference with the students who have the highest need or have not

historically had the same access to opportunities as their wealthier socioeconomic counterparts.

In addition to economic diversity, teacher retention is vital in high minority schools, particularly schools with high percentages of African American and Hispanic populations who have been historically absent from higher education. The demographic significance evolves from the need to remove barriers and afford better outcomes for students typically considered or categorized as at-risk youth. Difficult to staff schools also have difficulty holding on to principals which creates instability within the institution's systems leading to deficits for children.

The federal government has acted to affect education positively, and explicitly, reverse the underperforming schools through legislation, such as Lyndon B. Johnson's administration implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, George W. Bush's policy No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, or President Barack Obama's strategy with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. The need to serve all students magnifies the need to keep teachers who will best help all students and the entire system. Continuous turnover of teaching staff in any school or system causes the increased expenditure of both time and money needed to train, or retrain, the team to promote best practices for teaching students.

Findings through teacher retention research, inform school districts and campus leaders that could save money and improve student outcomes through stability. The most significant expense for a school district involves recruiting, paying, and sustaining personnel. Evidence supports claims that increased focus on teacher training and support increases job satisfaction and productivity over the long term (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Maintaining and improving schools and their leaders allows educators to enhance student success over time while simultaneously valuing veteran instructors' knowledge base, as they succor with training and encouragement of the novice teachers.

Teacher attrition results in student learning deficits, and novice replacement teachers are unable to compensate for those shortcomings. When effective teachers exit the profession, students end up with gaps in knowledge due to continually having new teachers replacing those that leave (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). Teacher attrition typically has a more significant impact in schools with high poverty and high minority populations (Darling-Hammond, 2010); which compound student learning deficits in those schools that need the best teachers and need them to stay.

The focus of the remainder of the chapter includes explicating the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, followed by the research questions. There is a summary of the methods and explanation of the terms applied. A discussion of the delimitations and limitations based on the type of study, as well as the context related to the plan for where the study appears. Lastly, the significance of the research and a connection to Chapter 2, and an introduction to the review of the literature complete Chapter 1.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is an increasing and profound need to support, grow, and retain teachers in the United States (US). Unlike some other countries, the US has yet to truly professionalize teachers or the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The professionalization of teachers offers opportunities for content and pedagogy growth

resulting in a higher respect for the vocation and supports its economic viability as a career route. Professionalizing the field allows for career growth through promotion based on an instructor's knowledge, experience, and capability with continued financial growth and opportunities for mobility up the professional ladder (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Significant growth of the student population in Texas public schools, along with large-scale retirements by the baby boomer generation from the teaching profession has placed higher demands on diminishing resources (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Ingersoll, 2006; Oliver, 2016). Additionally, there is a significant number of generation X and Z teachers entering the workforce but, they are also leaving the teaching profession as fast as they come into the career field (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Ravitch, 2010). This annual attrition leaves schools and districts spending large amounts of money every year trying to recruit new teachers' familiar with basic district practices and mandatory training. Basic required training includes The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Reporting Suspected Child Abuse to Child Protective Services (CPS), blood borne pathogens, and proper technology usage to name a few. Their initiation also demands other extensive preparations for assimilating these teachers into their roles within the actual classroom (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2016). Moreover, districts struggle to find mentor teachers when so many of their teaching staff are themselves within 0 to 5 years of entering the education profession (Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010; Smollin, 2014; & Oliver, 2016).

The focus of studies related to teacher retention and attrition review generalizable factors for culpability, not far-reaching standardized solutions implemented to keep



teachers across the state of Texas or the nation. A key factor in teacher retention and attrition prevention is supportive leadership (Bartolette & Connelly, 2013; Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2009; The Center for Comprehensive School Reform, 2007; Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Smollin (2014) showed that 14% of teachers leave the classroom after the first year (Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010; & Smollin, 2014), and 46% of teachers leave the profession before the fifth year (Smollin, 2014). This attrition data is consistent with the findings by Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2010), who said that teachers leave their jobs within their first 3 to 5 years in the profession. Another factor for attrition postulated by Smollin (2014), as well as Marzano et al. (2010), involves teachers not receiving the instructional support, coaching, or classroom management strategies they need to handle the demands of the first year of teaching.

Wong (2003) found success criteria related to teacher retention and student success. Wong noticed novice teachers need 5 to 7 years to develop the skills necessary to be effective in teaching students. Also, the number of teachers becoming eligible for retirement has exceeded the numbers of teachers entering and staying in the classroom (Hughes, 2012). In support of these findings, Borman and Dowling (2006) and Hughes (2012) agreed that the annual cost of recruiting, hiring, and keeping teachers from turnover is an overwhelming \$2.2 billion.

Determining what leadership actions a school district and campus can master to support, grow, and keep teachers necessitates identifying individual leadership qualities. Servant leadership is considered a fitting leadership quality but dictates the need for self-awareness on the part of a leader (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Yukl, 2009). In consideration of the challenges and efforts that leadership can

employ to support, grow, and then keep teachers, a leader must sustain professional and strategic balance in multiple areas. The leader, considering standardized testing, must consider the symbolic, human resource, structural, and political frames of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013). For teachers to be successful, despite the pressures of accountability, their leaders must be astute in multiple areas. The investigation into the characteristics of leadership being the most influential factor in teacher retention, from novice teachers' perspectives, is a critical element in implementing solutions. More specifically, how leaders' actions or inactions positively or negatively impact novice teacher perceptions about staying in their schools or the education profession has not been fully vetted. Leaders' behaviors impact novice teachers support perceptions and ultimately result in the retention of teachers for the best possible student learning outcomes.

### **Statement of the Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to find what leadership methods and administrative supports are needed to keep teachers in classrooms and the field of education. The focus was the determination of how school leaders can promote teacher retention through their leadership practices and support given to novice teachers. The qualitative study acquired information through focus groups, and interviews with novice teachers. Novice teacher, defined as working in the classroom for 0 to 3 years (TEA, 2016). The goal was to investigate what leaders can do or improve according to novice teachers. The three questions guiding this study were the following:

1. What can principals/school leaders provide to support and retain teachers?

2. Do the leadership principles outlined by Marzano et al. (2005) align with novice teacher job satisfaction enough to retain teachers?
3. What are the most important pillars of the leadership responsibility matrix as they pertain to perceptions of novice teachers about retention?

### **Significance of the Study**

This research offers an opportunity for further discovery to support leadership development for teacher retention. With the inclusion of research-based programs and training, there is an opportunity to aid district leaders in deciding how to best support teachers and administrators in the implementation of retention programs and for generating student success in learning. Marzano et al. (2005) offered a framework for teachers to have a structured, systematic environment in which learning can occur. The creation of a supportive climate might aid in keeping teachers long term. Also, the training of administrators to better support teachers increases teacher retention, according to Marzano et al. (2010). The findings might offer information to campus and district leaders and enrich this area of the literature by giving direction to essential areas of focus for monetary and personnel supports for saving teachers.

The literature showed teachers leave the classroom due to challenging work environments within their schools. This research might enable educational leaders to understand better the positive and negative impacts they can have on their organization. Novice teacher perceptions of a leaders' impact on teacher retention might afford guidance to school administrators seeking to improve the retention of new teachers. This study's findings could be used to save school districts money by preventing teacher turnover and the loss of funds used for hiring, recruiting, training, retraining, and

supporting teachers (Barnes, Crowe, & Schafer, 2007; Borman & Dowling, 2006; Hong, 2010; Hughes, 2012).

### **Methodology Overview**

The school district studied serves a high poverty, high minority student population. The district has approximately 12,000 students, served by one primary high school, three middle schools, eight elementary schools, and three specialized campuses. Permission was garnered from the school district to conduct the qualitative review. The novice teachers had 0 to 3 years of experience and were found by the district's human resources department through open records request for contact information for those teachers fitting the 0 to 3 years parameter. Focus groups were the primary format for data collection. Also, a one-on-one interview was done to accommodate a participant and to continue adding to and comparing the data already collected in the focus groups. The predicted sample size was 12 to 15 novice teachers.

### **Definition of Terms**

Key terms are defined in this section of the study to better assist in a common understanding of the meaning of terms regarding the actual study.

*Campus or school principal also called campus leadership* at any Kindergarten through 12th-grade public school.

*Collective efficacy in schools* involves having a shared vision or goals between teachers, leadership, and community builds a greater confidence in the ability to reach the desired result (Yost, 2006; as interpreted from Pajares, 1996; Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017).

***District leadership*** support personnel for Kindergarten through 12th-grade public schools, from coordinators and directors to assistant superintendents and superintendents of these schools.

***Efficacy*** is the confidence and power to produce a desired result or effect (Bandura, 1994; Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017).

***Low socioeconomic demographic*** applies to students who qualify for the federal governments free or reduced lunch program related to family income and anticipated contribution (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

***Novice teachers*** are teachers who have 0 to 3 years of teaching experience (Kim & Roth, 2011; TEA, 2016).

***Servant leadership*** is described as compassionate, loving, supportive, and shared authorship (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 401, Yukl, 2012).

***Teacher retention*** involves keeping teachers who should be kept and have the capacity to support student learning successfully. Keeping those educators that if they felt supported and good about what they were doing at the school would otherwise stay, with the exception of natural attrition or for family reasons.

***Transformational leadership*** is “leadership that engages and empowers teachers in a collaborative decision process” (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008, p. 58).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations include the reality that data collection occurred within only one school district, setting the boundary that limited the scope of the research to a case study. Focus groups and interviews were the only methods for data collection. Likewise, only responses from teachers working within the given demographic environment of low

socioeconomic characteristic and high minority population were analyzed. The teachers were just novice teachers within the district, and only included volunteers in the pool of respondents. Another delimitation involved not including impressions of school leaders; whether teacher leaders, principals, assistant principals, or district leaders about the respondents' answers. Feedback from school leaders could have offered context for specific practices if participants did not holistically understand rationales for policies or processes.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation included the fact that data were primarily collected by focus groups and within only one school district as the case for the study. Focus groups might prevent some teachers from sharing information in front of others, and they might more aptly share if they were able to be anonymous or unknown to others beyond the researcher. Only a small segment of the population of novice teachers for this one school district in Texas was analyzed. The resulting data might not necessarily apply to all teachers in all schools, communities, or the education profession.

### **Assumptions**

There were some general assumptions of this study. A primary assumption was that there would be an improvement in the U.S. education system if teachers stayed. Another postulation is that any school can improve the level of instruction or the retention of teachers if following the suggested practices that result from the research. It was assumed if novice teachers receive supports by administrators from their campuses, teachers will stay in the profession for at least five years raising the likelihood that they would stay in teaching long term.

Another assumption is that student success improves when novice teachers have support from administrators, even when students are from low socioeconomic status and minority groups such as African American and Hispanic populations based on the district's demographic clientele. Another premise involved still employed, novice teachers would answer honestly and did not have politically-laden or personally biased views. The study was assumed to be able to generate a determination of why teachers leave their jobs to enable educational leaders to prevent teacher turnover. The final assumption involved believing educational leaders could influence novice teacher retention and district leaders would support campus leaders seeking to deliver the corrective actions needed.

### **Conclusion**

This conducted study contributed valuable information to support determinations for practices of district and campus leadership. If leadership knew what it would take to hold on to teachers, they could likely spend less time recruiting and training novice teachers. A reduction of turnover in novice teachers also reduces the educational impact on students that continuously have inexperienced teachers. The review of the literature imparts the background knowledge and supports this study's findings regarding recruiting and retaining novice teachers in high turnover, high poverty, and high minority schools. The literature also recognizes and explains the research already conducted regarding teacher retention and extrapolates the reasons for further study in high poverty schools in the United States.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Teachers are the cornerstone of education because they are the single most important factor in a student's education (Ravitch, 2010). An effective teacher can help propel a student forward with as many as three years of educational growth (Bartolette & Connelly, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2003). Conversely, an ineffective teacher can cause a student to suffer from a backward or negative spiral of 3 to 5 years of loss in grade-level education ability, leaving a student at a disadvantage to catch back up to their peers (Ravitch, 2010). These figures demonstrate that teacher retention is essential, particularly in schools with high numbers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and schools with large minority student populations, such as student body populations made up primarily of African American and Hispanic students. The significance of these student demographics involves the historical disparities some students have faced in schools that do not have the resources and facilities afforded to schools in more affluent areas. Moreover, schools with high poverty, low teacher retention, language barriers, and high numbers of minority students have also suffered from historically high numbers or percentages of students at-risk for dropping out of school and not graduating. These characteristics in schools tend to adversely affect schools' academic ratings and ultimately teacher recruitment efforts.

Minority-majority, or minority-dominant, schools can be challenging to recruit and staff with teachers. Staff retention, including principals, is severe because of existing pressures to turn these schools around when they may have a record of underperforming for years. Often these schools are comprised of only novice or new teachers with few veteran teachers available to facilitate and support novice teacher development. Over the



past 60 years, the federal government has been attempting to advance solutions that shift these negative trends, beginning with the passage of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. ESEA was amended with the passing of President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and signed into law in January of 2002. Most recently, under President Barack Obama's administration, a congressional update to ESEA enacted an update called Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and signed into law in December of 2015. These laws were passed as part of the national effort to serve all students equally, regardless of students' socioeconomic or racial backgrounds. These laws have affected the retention of teachers and magnified the need to hang on to teachers able to serve all students equally and effectively (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Krieg, 2006; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

The factors that most often affect teachers' decisions to stay in or leave the profession has been studied. Marzano et al. (2003) showed the greatest attrition occurs within teachers' first 3 to 5 years on the job. Fourteen percent of teachers leave education after the first year, and 46% of teachers leave the profession before the fifth year (Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010; Smollin, 2014). Over the past 25 years, since at least the 1990s when the US Congress and the federal government began reaching more deeply into K-12 education regulation, teacher attrition has become a prolific problem in the nation's public schools (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Simon & Johnson, 2013).

The number of teachers becoming eligible for retirement now exceeds the number of teachers entering or staying in classrooms (Hughes, 2012). The new teacher attrition problem and the retiring teacher phenomenon affect the annual costs of recruiting, hiring

and preserving teachers. The costs are staggering with the estimated annual national teacher replacement cost averaging about \$2.2 billion (Hughes, 2012). Due to the rapid loss of skilled veterans and high turnover of new teachers, the education system needs to present effective leadership supports for learning on the job. As well, there need to be qualified administrators to lead, willing to mitigate issues and formulate practical solutions for ensuring effectiveness in pedagogy and classroom management (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011).

Reasons for leaving, cited by novice teachers, include lack of instructional support, time for grading and other tasks during the school day, coaching, or classroom management strategies to handle the demands of the first year of teaching (Marzano et al., 2003; Smollin, 2014). Standing out from the various identified reasons for teachers leaving education is that of the school's leadership, or the principal as the most commonly cited factor (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011). Smollin (2014) and Marzano et al. (2010) found that first-year teachers who do not feel they receive instructional support, coaching, or classroom management strategies leave the field. Interestingly, the most consistently noted reason by teachers for returning to teaching year after year is the campus administrator, or principal (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011). The discrepancy creates a conundrum given that Wong (2003) reported the ratio of success to teacher retention and teacher ability to promote student success for educators with 5 to 7 years of experience. Most saliently, teachers need real leadership and support for 5 to 7 years to develop the skills necessary to be effective when teaching students.

School principals must supply the best educators to their students, while also controlling costs and staying on budget. Principals must enable their teachers' acquisition of pedagogical and other skills over time (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005). The vested time it takes to ensure teacher effectiveness, and skill is significant. Principals must balance the need to hold on to teachers and to ensure the school meets student achievement goals and requirements. Most often education improvement focuses on student learning outcomes through standardized state-mandated tests (TEA, 2016). The current focus on tracking student learning outcomes through annual tests has created negative impacts on teacher retention. Ensuring student learning outcomes places enormous pressure on teachers, particularly new teachers, who are under significant strain to increase students' performance on these examinations. Without support from their administrators, reaching student success goals according to state mandates can be insurmountable for some new teachers. Typically, teachers continue to teach when they feel they make a difference with the students of highest needs (Hunter Quartz, 2003). Competing pressures coupled with time constraints and adapting to a new job can create challenges for new teachers to feel successful. Demands on new teachers are amplified when working at low socioeconomic or minority-majority schools. Additional pressures include the challenges for new teachers working with children who may not speak English as a first language or who may be living in poverty. These variables can create trauma for some students worried about where their next meal will come from (Carroll, Reichardt, & Guarino, 2000; Hanushek et al., 2004; Kelly, 2004; Johnson, Kraft & Papay, 2012; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007).

The focus of this review of literature is on teacher retention as well as the relationship of teacher retention to school leadership. For the best possible student learning outcomes, we need to understand better what leaders can do to support and ultimately keep teachers. A conclusion completes this chapter.

### **Teacher Retention and School Leadership**

The most critical factor in the success of a child is the teacher-student relationship, followed closely by the leadership with collective efficacy within the school environment (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017). Teachers play a critical role in the education of children. Therefore, the need to keep teachers is perceptible. As Jim Collins (2001) suggested, if schools continuously turn over their best assets, their teachers, education will suffer. Loss of knowledge from attrition and the need for training and retraining on topics for the new teachers will stifle the success of students. Marzano et al. (2003), as well as Dufour and Eaker (1998), noted that teachers need at least three years of classroom experience to become competent in their role. As with many professions, teaching has an on-the-job learning curve. As with professional positions such as nurses in hospitals or attorneys in courtrooms, education professionals improve in performance as they gain familiarity and efficacy with their chosen profession in the classroom.

The teacher attrition problem has promoted a recursive cycle of departure, recruitment, and training. Not enough appears to be happening to prevent or reduce teacher turnover. The nation risks the loss of significant career field knowledge each time the classroom or school stage is set for perpetual attrition cycles and wasted resources. Starting over with new personnel on a regular annual basis negatively affects

students' learning (Johnson et al., 2012). Introducing an entirely new group of teachers each year is hugely problematic in schools with high poverty levels, a high percentage of at-risk students, and sizeable minority-majority student population (Hanusheck, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). The teacher attrition rates are highest among schools with high poverty and minority demographics (Carroll et al., 2000; Kelly, 2004; Scafidi et al., 2007; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). High poverty, at-risk minority students need experienced teachers who can effectively bridge educational gaps (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005b; Hanushek et al., 2004).

In 2005, Darling-Hammond declared a teacher shortage. Hughes (2012) argued the shortage may be due to the historically high number of teachers reaching retirement age and choosing retirement. The historic deficit results from the significant number of teachers leaving the profession within their first to the fifth year at the same time as large numbers of teachers retire (Hughes, 2012). DeAngelis and Presley (2007) suggested the teacher attrition problem may be overstated due to the methods used to obtain the results; primarily, they have suggested misinterpretation of data in other studies. Teacher recruitment for retention is next.

### **Teacher Recruitment**

In countries where teacher recruitment practices are designed for hiring the best possible teachers, global student achievement has increased significantly. In some cases, student achievements are amongst the top level among developed nations, specifically Finland and Singapore (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2010; Sahlberg, 2015). These countries have significant proven success in creating a cultural mindset about teaching that reveres educators and differs from many existing

opinions toward educators in the US. This shift to hold teachers in higher regard has occurred in these high achieving countries over only the past 20 years. In Singapore, becoming a teacher is a highly competitive enterprise and more teachers than available positions are in the education pipeline (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).

Meanwhile in the US, attracting and keeping the highest-performing graduates as teachers is precarious because these teachers have the highest risk for leaving the profession (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; DeAngelis & Presley, 2007). The data for standardized assessments, such as the ACT or SAT, suggest that teachers with the highest scores on these exams present a greater tendency to leave the teaching profession within the first five years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; DeAngelis & Presley, 2007). Additionally, teachers certified for mathematics and sciences could find gainful, potentially much more lucrative employment outside of teaching. Math and science teaching positions are also more often the hardest positions for which to recruit. Fewer, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) or computer science students are graduating from college in the US than other countries and many US college students earning these STEM majors are international students who leave the US after graduating (Kuenzi, 2008). There are many fewer teaching applicants than positions to teach mathematics and sciences. Some schools have begun offering extra stipends in addition to base pay to encourage these educators to continue to teach math or sciences each year (Texas Association of School Boards, 2016). These math and science teachers teach the same students, have the same workloads as English or social studies teachers, but they earn higher incomes because finding teachers certified to teach these subjects is more competitive when competing with high wage professions.

For many academic subjects, the number of available certified teachers in the US equals the need of the schools for hiring teachers. However, many graduates forgo teaching, preferring to obtain positions in other professions because those fields offer higher starting salaries and more prestige (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). The problem has been addressed in countries like South Korea, Finland, and Singapore, where policies have raised the prestige of the profession and created a system with strict regulations for entry into the preservice professional training found within universities (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).

Teacher attrition is also attributable to the lack of opportunities for administrators to adequately support teachers with their need for learning on the job (Darling Hammond, 2010). Teachers must learn their way around the classroom and develop skills not typically fully developed during preservice preparation programs. New teachers gain skill sets and knowledge that lead to higher job effectiveness in the first 3 to 5 years making support and training on the job critical to their retention (Johnson et al., 2012; Marzano et al., 2003, 2005; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). The lack of popularity of the teaching profession might be the result of 20 years of in-depth state and federal regulation that affects classroom practices, pressures of high stakes testing, and pay for performance programs. These practices might exacerbate the teacher shortage problem by positioning teaching into an unfavorable job prospect (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).

### **Cost of Teacher Recruitment and Attrition**

Teacher turnover is expensive and detrimental to schools and districts. In urban districts throughout the US, the cost to each district's central office to recruit, hire, and train teachers, estimated at \$70,000 to \$100,000 annually. Nonurban school districts

costs averaged \$33,000 annually (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) reviewed data from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), in Partnership with the MetLife Foundation, determined that school districts spend \$6,250 to \$8,750 on every lost teacher depending on the location of the school district as suburban, rural, or urban (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; Watlington et al., 2010). The estimated total annual cost for all schools and districts in the US to recruit, hire, and train new teachers is \$7.34 billion (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007).

Teachers who leave districts not only cost the district's money but they also negatively burden student learning. When teachers leave, schools experience significant deficits in knowledge that collectively impact students throughout entire schools, as well as individuals throughout the students' educational careers. The knowledge gap occurs because teachers who leave, take their intellectual capital with them. Schools lose experienced teachers who could have otherwise mentored and coached less experienced or novice teachers. When schools do not preserve teachers, the entire system is compromised as schools face the constant need to train new faculty on the basics of teaching students. When schools' personnel are experienced enough to mentor new teachers, these schools generate built-in support for inexperienced teachers that strengthen their teaching efficacy and enable all teachers in the school to experience job satisfaction for staying in the profession (Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2001).

There also appears to be a relationship between teacher retention and student success. Teachers need 5 to 7 years in the classroom to develop the skills necessary to be truly effective with students (Wong, 2003). Sanders and Rivers (1996) noted that



children who are taught by ineffective teachers for more than two years in a row undergo loss of student learning to such a level that these students never catch up to their peers who had competent teachers. High minority, high poverty schools dealing with the highest amounts of teacher attrition show students suffer from learning deficits (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersol, 2001). Urban students of poverty often come from families in which English is not the first language spoken in the home. In these homes, parents may be unable to speak the English language and are hampered from helping their children with homework (Falch & Strom, 2004; Hanushek et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2011; Scafidi et al., 2007). Teachers new to these circumstances may choose to quit teaching rather than adapt.

The costs for preparing the professional development needed for new teachers who replace veteran teachers negatively affects schools (Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, 2009). These recurring costs are unsustainable and fiscally irresponsible long term. Low or declining teacher retention year after year reduces school effectiveness to improve student performance by limiting the ability to build on knowledge acquired by school teachers during the prior academic year. Increased professional development resources must account for all the knowledge lost when teachers leave and are replaced by less capable newly hired teachers. Days out of the classroom by new teachers attending professional development also increases ancillary costs as well. Substitute teachers are required in addition to trainers, facilities, and possible food and travel expenses, all compound cost burdens to schools and districts.

## **Professional Status of Teachers**

The education field has not been a well-respected profession in the U.S. (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers resultantly suffer from a lag in pay and a general lack of respect. Shaw pointed out in 1903 that people in the U.S. made comments such as “those who can do, those who can’t teach” and “he who can do, he who cannot teach.” Sadly, these types of comments continue to be echoed in the 21st century, suggesting a lack of respect for this career field or profession. In 1903, John Dewey argued the US needed to improve the retention of qualified teachers; however, the nation’s schools continue to suffer from teacher attrition and poor student performance (Theobald & Michael, 2002). Diminished respect experienced by the profession correlates to the pay earned by new teachers which trails entry-level professional positions in other industries in many areas of the US (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). In other countries, when relative teacher pay elevates to a comparable level of other careers, graduates could alternatively enter, schools undergo a significant reduction in attrition and a substantial increase in interest for the profession (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). The importance of the positive perceptions of education as a profession is critical for understanding how to attract and recruit highly qualified talent to teach. In Singapore, Hong Kong, and Finland, the status of teachers was raised by requiring aspiring teachers to be in the top 5% of their classes before entering a university-level teacher education program (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).

Increasing numbers of teachers are entering high poverty, high minority school districts with the belief that their efforts will make a difference with the children they instruct (Hughes, 2012; Hunter Quartz, 2003). While increasingly teachers are initially willing or attracted to serve in high poverty, high minority school districts they may be

leaving for reasons other than the students. Working conditions in schools with high poverty, high minority student populations cause teachers to suffer from limited resources and lack of support for teachers, which are probably the primary reasons for instructors leaving (Simon & Johnson, 2013). Multiple researchers have cited salary among the top reasons for teacher attrition after controlling for other factors (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Boyd et al., 2011; Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001; Shen, 1997). Lack of leadership, some have posited, follows salary dissatisfaction as responsible for teacher attrition. Specifically, teachers seek greater support and having a voice in decision-making about work assignments (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Boyd et al., 2011; Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001; Shen, 1997).

In extensive, multi-state, quantitative studies on teacher retention, multiple factors have been implicated in affecting teacher retention, and some of those factors are more complicated than merely teachers dealing with students' demographics and buildings with high security (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Boyd et al., 2005a; DeAngelis & Presley, 2007; Dolton & van der Klaauw, 1995; Elfers, Plecki, & Knapp, 2007; Hanushek et al., 2004; Hanushek et al., 2005; Ingersoll, 2001b; Murnane & Olsen, 1990; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990; Scafidi et al., 2007; Theobald & Girtz, 1996). Alternatively, researchers have begun to focus on analyzing school and district leadership as a primary reason for teachers' decisions to persist or resign. Leaders drive the culture and direction of a district's schools and could create collegial and collaborative working environments (Bartolette & Connelly, 2013; Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Boyd et al., 2011; Center for Comprehensive School Reform, 2007). Positive relationships between teachers and leaders, teachers and their peers, teachers and staff, as well as students and families, are

necessary for keeping teachers. Other needs of teachers include time to collaborate, a school's mission whereby all faculty and staff believe students can learn, and the sensation of working with a team, collective efficacy (Boyd et al., 2011; Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll, 2005; Johnson et al., 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2013; Shen; 1997).

High poverty schools may suffer from maintenance deferments that may lead new teachers to believe their working conditions are unsafe. The environmental conditions within a school, including the conditions of floors, ceilings, or walls, must meet basic human functioning standards and safety needs for ensuring students and faculty can focus on learning (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1968, 1970; McLoeb, 2016). Other than delivering safe and sanitary facilities, teachers seek positive reinforcements such as caring students, staff, parents, and communities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Yost, 2006). There are other environmental considerations necessary to support teacher satisfaction and success such as access to resources including copiers and technology to conduct research and prepare lessons. If teachers have access to those fundamental tools, they tend to believe their work is held in high regard by their administrators and the public and may be motivated to prepare lessons, conduct research, lead activities, or prepare lesson plans and materials. For example, teachers feel supported by their administrative leaders when the leaders offer a plan for curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Allensworth et al., 2009; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Teachers tend to stay, according to Allensworth et al. (2009) of the Chicago schools, when professional learning communities are available to them (PLC). These tools may seem minor to those outside the profession, but their accessibility affects the overall attitude of a school's staff and teachers, making them feel as though they are not respected in the school.

A 6-year study by Bartoletti and Connelly (2013) concluded school leadership is the most important variable other than classroom instruction when working to ensure student learning. Bartoletti and Connelly called for school districts to institute leadership improvement training to improve school success. Within the causal relationship between leadership and faculty retention, leaders can unilaterally unleash the capacity of their teachers and staff by creating and supporting teachers' efforts to increase success with students. Carol Dweck (2006) argued leaders can create opportunities for employees to be successful by showing belief and support. When leaders believe in employees and create a culture of support, employees feel more fulfilled. Dweck (2006) suggested employees gain connectivity in the organization, leading to longer tenure and inspiring employees to work hard and become successful. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform (2007) emphasized the impact of good leadership on teacher retention in South Carolina and concluded that leadership was a top factor in teachers' decisions to endure or depart. This research concludes that lack of support from organizational leaders causes teachers to leave their jobs in education (Allensworth et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011; Shen, 1997; Simon & Johnson, 2013).

The trends denote a comfortable, safe, clean environment with collegial interactions, professional development, support for implementing professional learning in practice, and caring leaders enable teachers to feel supported (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005). People want to feel they are good at their job, even if only for an hour a day (Busteed, 2014). Teachers are people experiencing increasing pressures, and general lack of appreciation and these circumstances can lead to a reduction in job satisfaction and teachers leaving the field (Busteed, 2014).

Collegiality refers to teachers' feeling supported, sharing a rapport and trust, and interactions that produce respect (Johnson & Simon, 2013; Marinell & Coca, 2013). Collegiality is also associated with high levels of teacher retention or lower turnover (Johnson & Simon, 2013; Marinell & Coca, 2013). About 14% of teachers leave after the first year in the classroom (Auguste et al., 2010; Smollin, 2014). For a given cohort of new teachers entering a district, teachers exit within five years of entering the profession, only 54% of a cohort's teachers stay in the profession (Johnson & Simon, 2013, Marinell & Coca, 2013; Smollin, 2014). Interestingly, middle school teacher attrition is the highest with 66% leaving within the first five years (Johnson & Simon, 2013, Marinell & Coca, 2013; Smollin, 2014). These conclusive findings are consistent with Marzano et al.'s (2010) research that indicates that teachers leave within their first 3 to 5 years in the profession.

### **Strongest Supports According to Literature**

Studies identified three types of support as the most needed and useful for keeping teachers. These include professional learning communities (PLCs), instructional coaching, and mentors. Additionally, teachers need leaders who offer adequate support and make those types of supports a priority focus of the organization.

#### **The Professional Learning Community (PLC)**

Dufour and Ekert (1998) explained the concept of a PLC as a place where educators work collaboratively to enrich their professional skills in a safe environment. The PLC is a place for teachers to ask hard questions and receives nonjudgmental, supportive answers to improve teaching practices and student learning outcomes. For novice teachers, this support group offers a critical opportunity to ask questions about

how to efficiently teach before and after trying to implement strategies as the sole teacher in a classroom. This model benefits members of many professions as a collaborative, supportive opportunity to learn and improve skills. Attorneys, doctors, and engineers use the PLC for solving a problem in the field or collaborating on projects to generate the best outcomes.

To be effective, PLC members need to meet at least weekly, though some evidence points to value in daily PLC interactions (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Ingersol & Smith, 2004; Wynn, Wilson Carboni, & Patall, 2007). Another key to success includes grouping the PLC members by grade level or content area (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Additionally, PLC members who review student-level data gain more success with their students, and the PLCs cycle this process of review and improvement continuously (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). PLCs also offer an efficient form of professional development that is intensive, long-term, aligned to specific goals for improvement, and ongoing (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Wynn et al., 2007). Teachers of the same subjects having similar planning times and expectations to meet and collaboratively support each other leads to positive outcomes for students when tied to specific instructional goals and coaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017).

### **Instructional Coaching**

Teachers receive support from an instructional coach who can help them implement new strategies in their classrooms and learn how to improve their professional skills while feeling supported. If teachers are observed only during a formal evaluation for their annual performance appraisals, they become nervous and unlikely to engage in

meaningful dialogue to learn. The observation as an evaluative structure can result in teacher dissatisfaction and attrition. Teachers need observations of their instruction, but they also need to learn from what was observed. If they have collegial relationships and support from instructional coaches, they are likely to be much more successful as well as satisfied (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Johnson et al., 2011).

A study was completed on the evaluation and coaching received by new teachers (Isreal, Kamman, McCray, & Sindelar, 2014). Isreal et al. (2014) referred to the use of mentoring for teacher enrichment and emphasized instructional coaching as a sound practice for professional mentoring. Isreal et al. noted that mentoring, induction and instructional coaching are interrelated constructs that are often interchangeable. Isreal et al. more specifically related mentoring to professional mentoring, and thus preferring instructional coaching as a method for evaluating and improving the skills of new teachers, along with standards of implementing curriculum through differentiation. Additionally, Isreal et al. found that new teachers noted that the “availability of debriefing and support [and] providing praise and understanding about the difficulty of being a new teacher” was extremely helpful to professional mentoring and coaching (p. 61).

Instructional coaching is a critical piece of professional improvement for improving student learning outcomes. Along with mentoring, teachers receive emotional support from PLCs. The support and mentoring need to be interlaced with instructional coaching to support new teachers’ growth with instruction, content, curriculum, and classroom management (Wynn et al., 2007). New professionals need the general emotional support they gain in PLCs to feel fruitful and be preserved; however, the



caveat is that retaining teachers alone does not improve student outcomes (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

## **Mentors**

Collegial relationships with school leaders as well as fellow teachers provide novice teachers opportunities to share and exchange ideas, which supports retention. A mentor can supply a novice teacher with a non-punitive sounding board for inquiry about teaching practices, lesson implementation, and classroom management strategies (Johnson & Simon, 2013). A more experienced teacher in similar areas of education can be a contributory factor in improving retention due to the need to have the most efficient teachers in not only high poverty, minority-dominant facilities, but also for all types of schools (Hanushek et al., 2004; Johnson & Simon, 2013).

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) conducted a critical review of research regarding the impact the induction and mentoring of novice teachers. They investigated 500 studies eligible for review and yielded 15 empirical studies dating back to the 1980s. Their empirical studies showed various outcomes in the implementation of induction, analysis, and observation of new teachers, intensity or programs evaluated, and results. Overall, Ingersoll and Strong concluded mentoring saves teachers, strengthens instruction, and improves pedagogy and relationship building, as well as positively informs classroom management techniques and student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The clarification this study bestows is positive reinforcement for the use of mentoring as “personal guidance provided by seasoned veterans to beginning teachers” (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p.203).

Mentoring is most effective when the mentoring teacher shares a similar instructional content background with their mentee teacher (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Isreal et al., 2014). Ingersoll and Strong (2011) researched mentoring models and found mentees who have mentoring during a pullout time with the mentor, consistently over a 2-year period, obtain the most significant benefit. Further, mentoring is not intuitive because not all teachers who mentor can successfully articulate how they teach or the way they instruct, and not all teachers can explain to a novice teacher the plethora of ways to handle classroom situations efficiently and to find solutions to problems (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Mentoring programs are most effective when available via PLCs that include: new teachers and mentors, built-in observation time of other teachers during classroom instruction, self-assessment, reflection, and reduced workloads with no added duties for these mentors and mentees during the mentoring or induction period (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005). Additionally, considerations for teaching assignments and the number of different preparations available to novice teachers need to be made to ensure novice teachers do not face the most challenging students and environments daily while they are still learning and growing as professional educators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Fulton et al., 2005).

Thus, the most effective mentoring programs furnish mentor teachers with ongoing training and support as well as involvement in PLCs. The practice of enabling mentors to have a place to ask questions and discuss solutions for imparting support, direction, and feedback to their mentees increases the likelihood of successful mentoring relationships between mentors and mentees (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Nonetheless, no mentoring program can compensate for a school environment functioning competitively

instead of collaboratively, lacking a culture of communication and support, or lacking support from school leaders (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wynn et al., 2007, Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017).

### **Support by School Leaders**

School leaders mitigate misunderstandings, build teams, and balance the work and the environment for their teachers; this demands their ability to engage in situational awareness (Marzano et al., 2005). When leaders hear, understand, mitigate, and support teachers' perceptions, they enable their schools to thrive. Working together to support the school as a team, teachers and administrators can devise plans of action for student learning and success (Bolman & Deal, 2012; Marzano et al., 2005). Teachers' perceptions of their school leader's willingness to listen, to support their work, and to collaborate on ideas about improving schools, affect the organizations overall (Boyd et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2013). This research suggests that the most significant factor in teacher retention is campus leadership. Displaying the willingness to listen, for example, can be accomplished through leadership by using an open-door policy, classroom and school walk-throughs during multiple times of any day, faculty discussion groups with feedback loops, and department chair meetings that enable teachers' input about school initiatives that also include a follow-up process (Marzano et al., 2005). If the school leader is viewed as either unsupportive, not collaborative, or unconcerned for the work teachers perform, it may influence teacher decisions about leaving their schools, districts, or education altogether. Leaders who supply support and coaching to teachers enable them to return year after year and to obtain sufficient learning outcomes with students.

In summation, Johnson et al. (2012) found that “schools with stronger principal leadership, collegial relationships, and school culture were facilities where teachers were more satisfied, and students experienced greater academic growth” (p. 35). This finding is particularly significant for teachers working in high-poverty, minority-dominant schools, which compel more stability and consistency and need teachers with ample experience of more than five years of teaching. Therefore, leaders need self-awareness, to understand the work, to create plans, and successfully implement their plans (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Marzano et al., 2005; Yukl, 2009). Given the challenges of supporting and retaining teachers as they grow into experienced veterans, school leaders should provide a balanced workplace in multiple areas; including human resources, structural, and political frames of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013), which can be imparted to faculty by applying the 21 responsibilities of a school leader (Marzano et al., 2005).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Teachers’ needs, according to Maslow’s (1943, 1954, 1968, 1970) hierarchy of needs, must be met to focus on retention goals. Teachers need comfortable, safe, and sanitary school environments so that they can ensure learning by students (Johnson et al., 2012). Maslow proposed if a person does not feel safe, even if he or she has shelter and food, little teaching or learning will be possible. If teachers worry about earning enough income as a classroom teacher to pay for housing or taking care of their families’ needs, they will equally not be able to enrich their students’ learning. School leaders can ensure teachers’ needs are met by adhering to their leadership responsibilities, such as those described by Marzano et al. (2005).

The 21 responsibilities of a school leader, as defined by Marzano et al. (2005), present a basis for understanding the relationship between school leadership and teacher retention. Marzano et al. revealed how students become successful in a review of over 400 published studies' data. Marzano et al. laid out a framework of 21 responsibilities of a school leader that are researchable for addressing school leadership and teacher retention. Marzano et al.'s 21 responsibilities of a school leader were related to successful student learning outcomes and to the support provided by school leaders that leads to teacher retention (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Boyd et al., 2011; Center for Comprehensive School Reform, 2007; Johnson et al., 2012). The 21 responsibilities appear in Table 1.

Table 1

*Marzano et al. 's 21 Responsibilities of a School Leader*

Responsibility	Description
(1) Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failure
(2) Change Agent	Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo
(3) Contingent Reward	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments
(4) Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students
(5) Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation
(6) Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus
(7) Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
(8) Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention
(9) Ideals/Beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
(10) Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies
(11) Intellectual stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture
(12) Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
(13) Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
(14) Monitoring/ Evaluating	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning
(15) Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
(16) Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines
(17) Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders
(18) Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff
(19) Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs
(20) Situational Awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems
(21) Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students

*Note.* Descriptions quoted from Marzano et al. (2005, p. 42).

## **Conclusions**

Leaders that foster a safe, resource-rich, collaborative, and collegial environment can enhance teacher retention. School leaders who arrange for scheduled time and regular opportunities to advance coaching and collaborative engagements are much more likely to hold on to and recruit competent teachers. Attrition costs are high and unsustainable, leaving school districts' leaders crippled in recognizing retention mechanisms. Additionally, the academic losses experienced by students who are taught by ineffective teachers are unrecoverable and embody a crucial reason to make teacher retention a primary focus for education reform.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The majority of the studies on teacher retention and the role of administrators have been quantitative, and recommendations for additional qualitative studies continue (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Johnson et al., 2012). School leaders need to appropriately capture teachers' input regarding necessary support they expect from administrators if they are to return to their classrooms year after year. The need for more research concentrating on how school leaders might enhance teacher retention and how districts and policymakers can provisionally support leaders (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersol, 2001; Marzano et al., 2003). Additional qualitative studies were called for to obtain teachers' perceptions of support and of what leadership help novice teachers in high poverty, minority-dominant schools need for being kept in the field of education (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersol, 2001). In particular, Johnson et al. (2012) suggested explicitly that in order to fill these gaps, researchers need to conduct interviews "to examine why some working conditions are especially important, how they interact day to day, and what can be done to ensure that all schools serving low-income, high-minority students become places where teachers do their best work" (p. 34).

A qualitative study was undeniably needed in Texas because it is one of the lower performing states in the nation; any increased performance would support the academic numbers of students living in poverty and populating minority dominant public schools (Isensee, 2016; Schneider, 2014). This chapter encompasses the purpose, process, and procedures followed to study the perceptions of novice teachers in a Texas school district. The goal was to learn what is necessary for keeping teachers in high poverty, high minority school districts in Texas. The results may reveal valuable knowledge related to



teacher support and retention. The hope is that the study will facilitate an understanding and provide insight into specific recommendations for practice that administrators can add to their repertoire of skills, based on novice teachers' perspectives.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Qualitative research with teachers presents an opportunity for further discovery regarding how leaders' styles, behaviors, and approaches support teachers toward retention. Through research, there is a chance to enable district leaders to impart guidance and opportunity for principals seeking to support teacher and student learning. School district leaders can promote adequate school environments in which campus principals can hold on to their respective teachers for longer tenures. Furnishing data-driven professional development, to administrators for supporting teachers, can increase teacher retention (Marzano et al., 2003). This study was qualitative and therefore did not include a hypothesis. The research questions were the following:

1. What can principals/school leaders provide to support and retain teachers?
2. Do the leadership principles outlined by Marzano et al. (2005) align with novice teacher job satisfaction enough to retain teachers?
3. What are the most important pillars of the leadership responsibility matrix as they pertain to perceptions of novice teachers about retention?

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to study the perceptions of teachers in a high minority, high poverty school district in Texas (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). The research involved understanding the teachers' perspectives about how they experienced support delivered by leaders within a school district in Texas (Creswell, 2013). The perspectives of the novice teachers,

defined as having 0 to 3 years of experience (TEA, 2016), were sought. Taking the teachers perspectives from one single school district in Texas was selected based on its phenomenon of working in high poverty, high minority schools with school leaders having standardized backing from the district's central leaders (Creswell, 2013). The data sets were drawn from focus group interviews for formulating a set of postulates that could be applied by school district's central office personnel, guided by a superintendent.

In this study, focus groups appropriately enabled teachers to generate collaboration within the group, while sharing their thoughts and feeling supported by other teachers. This same method has been used in other education-based studies to gain a deeper understanding of shared experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) showed the best-suited problems for this type of research are those that bestow guidance about best practices or policies. Relative to leadership practices that can best support teacher retention, the focus group was a well-suited data collection method. Much like these novice teachers' experiences with their schools' leaders, the phenomenon of experiencing learning or the beginning of fatherhood are explained as phenomenologically applicable study areas (Van Manen, 1990).

The purpose was to uncover what supports teachers need to stay engaged year after year in school classrooms. The focus was to discover how leaders from the top of the district to the top of the school can drive teacher retention through their facilitation of school culture development. A supplementary goal was to enrich this area of the literature by delivering direction to school district leaders in supporting and maintaining their teachers.

## **Research Design**

This research fell within a social constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2013). Crotty (1999), Sipe and Constable (1996), and Creswell (2013) each supported the idea that construction of individual realities is based on individual experiences. The teachers' experiences and perspectives yield phenomenological answers about what resources teachers lack and their needs for staying in their current positions or education as a career field. The research was focused on novice teachers within a Texas school district encompassing a high number of students living in poverty as defined by their federal self-reported free and reduced lunch applications that showed 87.7% of the students in the school district were economically disadvantaged (TAPR, 2016). Finally, the school district of study served a majority population of Hispanic students at 83.1% and African American students at 9% (TAPR, 2016).

The study was conducted via the phenomenological approach because all the novice teachers experienced the similar phenomenon of being new to teaching in the classroom or having 0 to 3 years of experience in this Texas school district. The teachers all worked in the same district in Texas, and all the school leaders were led by one district administrative team consisting of only a few district leaders. All novice teachers went through the same new teacher in-service program and the same mentoring program regardless of whether they had taught in another district before being hired to teach in this school district.

This design was particularly relevant to this study as the literature review produced limited qualitative data studies, as well as little to no novice teacher perception data regarding what leaders can do to keep teachers. For example, teachers leave the

industry because of their experiences, which could denote a direct relationship to their perceptions of their environments and leadership support occurring within their respective schools.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Maxwell (2013) echoed the ideas of Crotty (1999) and Creswell (2013) by revealing that the way people perceive their environments and interact within their circumstances influences their reality making via social constructivism. Based on this assertion, a phenomenological approach was most fitting for the study. Additionally, human capital theory (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993; Shen, 1997) and social learning theory applied to characterizing novice teachers as economically rational decision makers (Shen, 1997; Theobald, 1990).

The human capital theory suggested that teachers make cost-benefit analyses of whether to stay or leave teaching as a profession. Social learning theory was used by Theobald in the 1980s to study teachers in Washington state. In social learning theory, people learn from each other by monitoring, imitating, or modeling from others whether by purposeful actions or passively viewing (Bandura, 1977). Marzano et al. (2005) presented the 21 responsibilities that are in Table 1 which is the frame for developing the themes for the study as related to understanding the practices that sustain teachers. After establishing the codes from the focus group and interview data, and working with the codes to develop themes, the theoretical applicability was solidified, as appropriate.

### **Description of the Population, Setting, and Sample**

The school district served approximately 12,000 students and a 92% minority population of students (TEA, 2017). The district had a high percentage of students

eligible for free and reduced lunch program status at 87.7% (TAPR, 2016). The participants corresponded to a range of grade level teachers from Kindergarten through the 12th grade. The researcher obtained novice teachers' contact information from the district via open records requested for directory information of teachers with 0 to 3 years of experience in the district's classrooms. The district's human resources department identified the pool of novice teachers in the district and emailed the information to the researcher.

The sample was purposive, and one of convenience as the population for study existed within the researcher's sphere of accessibility (Creswell, 2013). The researcher did not discriminate between campuses in the Texas school district to ensure enough participation in the study. School location and other personally identifiable data were de-identified in the data file to protect the confidentiality of the focus group participants. Creswell (2013) noted that convenience sampling offers efficiency but can affect the transferability or generalizability as well as credibility of the findings in advancing conclusions beyond the sample.

Phenomenology was considered an appropriate method for a sample involving a range of 5 to 25 one-on-one interviews and 20 to 60 individuals participating via other methods of gathering data (Creswell, 2013). These sample sizes denoted the predicted sample with which the researcher intended to hold focus groups and follow-up interviews. The number of new teachers in the district could have exceeded 200; therefore, when asking for permission for the research study, the researcher used a range of 15 to 100 novice teachers to ensure the opportunity to achieve saturation. This plan provided leeway to expand the number of participants if saturation was not achieved with

12 to 15 participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher realized the amount of data that could be collected from 100 participants would make the coding of that much data extremely labor intensive and would not be a realistic sample size for qualitative analysis.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

Before engaging in any collection or analysis of data, the researcher gained approval for completing the study with the school district using the necessary research request submission as listed on the district's website and with the University of Texas Institutional Review Board (2016). With approval, the primary method of data collection involves multiple focus groups with the novice teachers. Creswell (2013) noted that it was fitting to use focus groups to promote sparking conversation on the topic of how leaders can retain teachers from novice teacher perspectives for the study. The focus groups included from two to five individuals per focus group to enhance the richness of the data and improve the study (Krueger, 2002; Oliver, 2016). Additionally, the district's and the participants' names and identifying data were masked to protect confidentiality.

The researcher endeavored to gather information from five focus groups. With this level of conversation in a phenomenological study, the experiences of the individuals with their campuses' leaders garnered the insight into what leaders can do to keep teachers. The focus groups were organized by convenience to best support rich and varied conversation and expression based on district practices and understandings at the unit of analysis within each grade that was represented. One-on-one interviews were indicated following the conclusion of the focus groups in case the need arose to clarify focus group data with participants and ensure precise coding. The interview checks could allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of participants' thoughts and ideas.

The researcher used an interview protocol with open-ended questions aligned to the research questions (see Appendix A). In phenomenological research using focus groups, the format involves beginning with one or two primary questions and asking follow-up questions to refine understanding, delve deep into the topic, and ensure that the primary questions were fully answered (Creswell, 2013; Krueger, 2002). This structure allowed for open-ended dialogue and discussion and protected the researcher from inserting bias about the perceptions shared by the novice teachers. There were four questions to start to gather general participant information and establish comfort before delving into the primary questions. The primary question number five, “what can school leaders do to retain teachers” was asked again at the end of the questioning session in case anyone wanted to add anything that had not been mentioned. The main question was also asked again so participants could reemphasize or clarify what they felt was most important to them after all the discussion in the group. The researcher used open coding or clusters of meaning with the focus group and any follow-up interview data to shape the initial categories for expressing the participants’ perceptions and thoughts related to how school leaders can keep teachers. The focus group questions were based on the main questions guiding the study and related to what teachers suggest leaders can do to hold on to teachers. Additional questions were generated from the main areas of the 21 responsibilities of a school leader from Marzano et al. (2005; refer to Table 1).

The focus group discussions involved applying the open-ended discussion points from the question protocol (refer to Appendix A for the focus group question protocol) based on the 21 responsibilities from Marzano et al. (2005). The method Creswell (2013) recommended for phenomenology included having one to two core, open-ended, or

probing questions derived from the study's research questions asked as clarifying, or reflective, questions for better understanding. As needed, exploration into what was meant by a phrase or word as well as to gain clarification occurred to better understand the context or content of answers, information, or terms. The desired outcome was to allow for the most open dialogue possible to gain the most exceptional level of insight and understanding into what teachers need from their leaders.

The data from focus group responses and interviews were used to derive a defensible theory regarding the culpable factors for disparate attrition rates at otherwise comparable schools. Focus group data were reviewed and coded using axial and then etic and emic coding. Open-ended or clusters of meaning, axial, etic, and emic coding procedures were used to generate categories for understanding the data offered by the novice teachers about their needs if they stay at their schools and in education.

### **Researcher Background and Positionality**

The researcher was prepared to conduct this study because of the various career work as well as education preparation. The researcher served in multiple school and district leadership roles and has worked to guide campus leaders in a school district. The researcher's experiences afforded context and understanding having served as a campus principal in a similar demographic environment. The researcher had worked as a teacher and coach, as was alternatively certified. The researcher worked, at the time of data collection, as the Director of Student Support. The researcher has worked with schools that have had success and others that have struggled. These experiences also furnished background and understanding about the experiences of the novice teachers.



The researcher received a bachelor's degree after attending Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and the University of Houston Clear Lake as well as a community college to bridge states' education requirements. The researcher also received a master's degree in education administration from the University of Houston Clear Lake creating a basis of knowledge in research and education. The researcher was working toward completing a doctorate in education from the educational leadership and policy department with the cooperative superintendency program focus at the University of Texas at Austin at the time the study was conducted.

The researcher was aware of the bias tendency and made considerations for the presence of bias during the data collection and analysis by sharing all factors recognized by teachers in their responses. Reflecting on positionality, according to Creswell (2013) and Maxwell (2013), the researcher believed that relational factors could be mitigated by realizing biases and actively, openly avoiding biased conclusions and results. The researcher acknowledged bias due to believing that leaders can genuinely serve in teachers' success and in the culture and climate of the school that can govern whether a teacher stays or goes. The researcher bracketed her thoughts and feelings to avoid these perceptions biasing the analysis and to best ascertain novice teachers' genuine perspectives regarding how leaders can support and hold on to novice teachers.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Due to convenience sampling, the need for maintaining participants' anonymity was critical. Because the study was focused on 0 to 3-year novice teachers, there was a need to ensure that teachers identities were confidential. Participants were assured before presenting their data, that the data would stay anonymous through masking and use of

pseudonyms. This effort promoted participants' willingness to be honest and increased the validity of the data (Creswell, 2013). The data for the campuses linked to the research, due to teacher turnover, were explored and compared to the overall district data to offer context and understanding about district leaders' connections to their campuses successes.

The study had pre-identified strengths as well as limitations. Strengths included explicit respondent anonymity, thus increasing the honesty of responses and validity of conclusions. Weakness was the researcher's connection to the organization as an authority figure, which could bias results garnered if unmitigated. Realizing and openly discussing this aspect of a connection to the organization by the researcher was a logical way to prevent reliability issues in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). The strength of this research relates to the extensive commitment to the organization by the researcher, offering support to the idea of the researcher wanting to understand how the organization could improve with data gathering as an essential means to that end. The only way this or other organizations could improve was to learn and understand why teachers leave the high poverty and high minority districts like the one in which data was collected.

The research was aligned through the already existing teacher mentoring program in the district. This program offered a convenient way to find participants in the focus groups and generate groups of two to seven participants, as human resources kept this data. Participants were gleaned using the list retrieved from human resources. The focus group sessions' questions were open-ended and yielded opportunities to allow participants to share as much as they wished to enrich the data. The use of openness was an important consideration because of the lack of deep-level data regarding teacher

retention in other studies (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Shen, 1997; Simon and Johnson, 2013).

The focus groups were not only audio recorded, but their data was transcribed in the transcription service Rev.com. Rev.com also generated transcripts of the interviews (Oliver, 2016). The researcher listened to and reviewed all audio recordings of the data collection sessions. The researcher collected both field and reflection notes while making memory reminders in a journal, as suggested by Maxwell (2013). NVivo was used to code data into categories of broad topics that emerged from coding the interview data. The categories appeared holistically from the interviewees and were applied to the framework of questions used to apply Marzano et al.'s (2005) 21 responsibilities of a school leader framework.

The reflective research notes, journal, enabled the researcher to record thoughts and ideas respondents offered in each focus group or interview. The notes created a clearer picture of the original meanings of data when used during and right after each session and allowed the researcher to record insights that occurred during the focus groups and follow-up interviews which helped during coding. Additionally, logging the thoughts presented to the researcher avoided imposing the researcher's thoughts onto data and enhanced the creditability of the research (Morrow, 2005; Stake, 1995).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The coding of the information collected from the novice teacher focus groups and interviews occurred using a qualitative technology coding program NVivo to have the capacity to manage the amount and type of data. The focus group data were used to extrapolate teachers' explicit rationales to how leaders support them in their campus

environments and thereby improve organizational ability to keep teachers in the future. The focus group questions were presented to respondents as a couple of broad questions (Krueger, 2002). All focus group and one-on-one interview participation was voluntary, and the researcher conducted all data collection and protected participants' identities and information with pseudonyms. All directory information was de-identified to protect the anonymity of the participants.

The focus group discussions with teachers involved asking a collection of standardized questions (see Appendix A for question protocol) in the same manner for all teacher participants interviewed. The researcher intended to have the focus groups with the novice teachers and then follow up with interviews and member checks to improve validity and reliability of the data extrapolated from the initial focus groups (Maxwell, 2013). The member checks could provide opportunities for participant review and comment on what the researcher discerned from the interviews as well as to interject whether the researcher accurately understood data meanings (Maxwell, 2013). Yet, focus group sessions went in depth, the sessions, proposed to be an hour to an hour and a half and instead lasted two to two and a half hours each. The groups yielded fruitful discussion that created infinite clarity. This amount of discussion enabled very deep understanding of the feelings of participant's data, deeming follow up sessions not necessary.

State data through the publicly available Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) (TEA, 2016) gave contextual clarity to measure the success of the chosen Texas school district at retaining teachers. The data collation and analysis delivered an understanding of the higher attrition rates at some schools over the other schools with

otherwise similar characteristics. The state data offered a descriptive analysis of the researched schools, but only as a reference, and were not interpreted for discovering culpable factors for teachers' attrition rates.

The data from focus group responses and interviews helped to formulate a defensible theory as to culpable factors for different attrition rates at otherwise comparable schools based on what leadership does. Interview data were reviewed and coded using axial and then etic and emic coding. Open coding for the major categories of information began the coding process and the sense-making of data ordered into assembled categories. Next axial coding allowed for organizing the core phenomena found in the data and defining the prominent categories which suggested a proposition to create the framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 2013). Then etic and emic coding (Creswell, 2013) uncovered categories to understand the data from the conversations about what novice teachers need from their school level leaders to stay at their schools and in education. The emic novice teacher perspectives were quoted from the teachers' transcripts. The administration of an etic scientific or researcher lens created the categories and distinguished the trends for an overall interpretation of the data. The selective coding of the data characterized a vivid glimpse for why teachers quit or what causes frustration or unhappiness. Selective coding suggested the foundational story behind the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013) of why teachers leave the field of education.

## **Conclusion**

This study involved exploring a microcosm of potential culpable factors for what leaders might do to support teacher retention in one Texas school district. This study

could be duplicated on a larger and more diverse scale and within a controlled environment to further understand and ultimately conclude why teachers leave. Grander analysis of other potential dependent variables could be isolated and controlled for on a statewide scale to investigate this study's theory and determinations. The small sample size did not diminish the importance of the study of teacher retention and did not nullify results and conclusions extrapolated. The study promoted the importance of teacher retention and cultivating leadership for success at retaining and supporting teachers. The idea of preventing teacher attrition by empowering a school districts' leaders with what supports are needed for keeping teachers enabled an inherent look at teacher attrition.

## **Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of the Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to uncover ways in which to support and retain teachers. The study also sought a determination of what leadership methods and administrative supports were needed to retain teachers in classrooms, schools, and the field of education. The focus of the study discovering how school leaders promoted teacher retention and what support mechanisms they provided to novice teachers based on Marzano et al.'s (2005) 21 responsibilities of a school leader.

### **Summary of Research Questions and Data Collection**

This study utilized focus groups and interviews with teachers that were either novice teachers or new teachers to the district where the participants taught. The study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What can principals/school leaders provide to support and retain teachers?
2. Do the leadership principles outlined by Marzano et al. (2005) align with novice teacher job satisfaction enough to retain teachers?
3. What are the most important pillars of the leadership responsibility matrix as they pertain to perceptions of novice teachers about retention?

To address the research questions, the researcher chose the qualitative methods of focus groups to complete this phenomenological study of novice teachers' perspectives. The data source consisted of the focus groups and interviews with novice teachers and teachers that were novices to the district. The focus groups allowed for open discussion and often yielded much deeper conversations. There were times when one teacher would give an answer that would incite a comment from someone else who would add to prior answers, precipitating deeper conversations. An additional interview allowed for

checking focus group data codes and patterns for confirmation of thematic findings. Both the interview and focus groups enabled the ability to obtain a deeper understanding of the novice teachers' needs and their perceptions of support from campus leaders.

### **Historical Data for the Period of the Study**

This study employed interview and focus group data from a mid to large size school district in Central Texas. The district served between 11,500 and 12,500 students; variation in the student population numbers relates to the district's highest mobility rate in central Texas. The district employed 891 teachers in eight elementary schools, three middle schools, one comprehensive high school, two alternative secondary programs campuses, and one child development center.

During the 2015-2016 school year, the average years of teaching experience were 7.5 years, yet the average number of years employed in the district was 5.0 years. Texas' overall average years of teaching experience was 10.9 years, and the overall average years of teaching within the district was 7.3 years. Thus, the district retained teachers for 2.3 years less than other districts in the state with a teacher turnover rate 3.5% higher than the state's teacher turnover rate. Additionally, 38.1% of the district's teachers had only 1 to 5 years of teaching experience. The state percentage of teachers working within the first 1 to 5 years was at 27.3% for the same school year of 2015-2016 (TEA, 2016). Table 2 shows district versus state teacher data (TEA, 2017).



Table 2

*Teachers' by Years of Experience in the District Versus in the State for School Year 2015-2016*

Teachers	District	State
Turnover percent	20.0	16.5
Years of experience		
All districts	7.5	10.9
Current district	5.0	7.3
Percent years of experience		
Less than 1 year	13.9	8.1
1 to 5 years	38.1	27.3
6 to 10 years	24.2	21.7
11 to 20 years	16.6	27.3
Over 20 years	7.3	15.7

### **Description of the Sample**

There were 462 teacher email addresses shared by the district human resources department. Email requests for participation were sent by the researcher to all 462 prospective participants the district discovered, through the open records request, as having 0 to 4 years of experience. Five focus group sessions were setup for the participants, and more than 20 participants volunteered to take part with ten other participants implying an interest in partaking even though concerned about having more than five years of teaching experience. Table 3 depicts the participants' characteristics.

Table 3

*Participants by Campus and Years of Experience in the District*

Group	Interview Length	Teacher	Campus*	Years of Experience
1	2.50 hours	Mone	Barbados	3.75
		Nina	St. John	1.75
2	2.33 hours	Jaime	St. John	0.42
		Kaya	St. Marteen	0.75
		Sanfrain	St. Croix	3.75
3	2.03 hours	Martinique	St. Thomas	1.75
		Puerto	St. Thomas	3.75
		Bahamia	St. Croix	2.00
		Tahiti	Bermuda	1.75
4	0.00 hours	No Attendees		
5	2.00 hours	Aruba	St. Thomas	2.00**
		Madison	Jamaica	3.90***
		Clemson	Dominique	3.75
6 <sup>+</sup>	1.27 hours	Miya	St. Thomas	2.00***

*Note.* \* Campus name by grade configuration follows: Barbados as PreK-5, Bermuda as 6-8, Dominique as PreK-5, Jamaica as PreK-5, St. Croix as 9-12, St. John as 6-12, St. Marteen PreK-5, St. Thomas as 9-12.

\*\* Teacher's 2 years of experience in the district were as a health science teacher but also included 20 years as special education support teacher. \*\*\* In addition to years in the district, the teacher also reported 7.9

total years as a teacher in another district. <sup>+</sup> Number 6 in the table was an interview because this participant was the only one who attended.

The dates of the focus group events were scheduled as Group 1: May 11, 2017; Group 2: May 17, 2017; Group 3: May 23, 2017; Group 4: May 30, 2017; Group 5: May 31, 2017. Volunteering teachers filled out a Google form to share their preferred date, location, and time. Out of the original 20 teachers who agreed to a specific time, date, and location, 13 teachers participated in the focus groups and one-on-one interview combined. One teacher contacted the researcher via email and offered to participate when the later request for participants was emailed, and on June 5, 2017, this teacher participated in the single one-on-one interview (scheduled to have been Group 6 as noted

in Table 3). The one-on-one participant interview had almost two years of experience in the district while reporting almost eight years of experience when adding in another district. The one-on-one teacher interview contributed information to check the accuracy of the codes developed during data analysis.

The 12 focus group participants included nine secondary school and four elementary school participants, from four different elementary schools. Four of the five focus group sessions occurred for at least two hours enabling the teachers to engage in multi-layered discussions. The grade configurations in the sample of teachers included both elementary and secondary schools in the district; however, not all schools in the district were represented.

### **Thematic Findings**

All focus groups and interviews were digitally recorded. All recordings were securely transcribed under a secure user account via the transcription software Rev.com. All transcriptions were reviewed and coded with the qualitative data analysis program NVivo. This software allowed for tracking of the coding electronically. The researcher coded the transcriptions in the context of the 21 responsibilities of a school leader from Marzano et al. (2005). As many of the 21 responsibility codes were found not to regularly fit the thoughts of the participants (see Appendix B), new codes were adopted as they emerged during analysis and were then used to code data.

The collective findings from the participants yielded what they thought to be most important for supporting and retaining teachers as the following seven themes:

1. Coaching
2. Communication

3. Relationships
4. Cooperative Team Building
5. Resources
6. Professional Learning Communities
7. Culture

Four of the themes that were most prevalent were from the 21 responsibilities of a school leader. Those were communication, culture, relationships, and resources when including mentoring as a resource. The other areas of the 21 responsibilities of a school leader were mentioned but not with enough frequency in the data to warrant thematic inclusion in the findings. Coaching was by far the most requested themed area by respondents for supporting and maintaining teachers. The presentation of the seven themes begins with coaching.

### **Coaching**

According to the participants, Coaching meant having the experience of their schools' leaders supplying feedback the novice teachers, either personally or through a proxy, to help the novice teachers learn and grow professionally. Coaching was the most common code (see Appendix B) signifying 12.83% of codes out of 1270 codes; there were 163 instances that coaching was captured. Coaching was a form of non-punitive feedback and was not used for evaluation purposes; it suggested mentoring, which was originally sub-coded under resources, and then as a reoccurring pattern, ultimately, coaching emerged as a unique theme. Novice teacher Mone (all names are pseudonyms) shared a personal experience related to her teaching tenure of not receiving any input or feedback from anyone. She revealed, similarly as the other participants noted, "it would

have really helped her” if someone would have provided her with counsel on her performance. Instead, Mone made the following statements:

“Is someone going to come tell me if I’m doing this right?” I guess not. Okay, great. I’ll just keep doing what I’m doing. I think just more consistent, constant feedback would be better, and I think the new T-TESS system is going to give way to that. I want to know what you (administration or experienced teachers) think. I think that’s an important thing, just to have the feedback more throughout the year, and not like, “Visitors are coming! Quick! TPOs!” It’s like, “Oh, God. I haven’t changed that in a week. Student work! Okay, we’re going to staple your notebook to the wall because I haven’t done anything with construction paper in forever ... do I even have any?” So, I just think ... coming through, and checking in ... that’s important. There should be a presence in your classroom.

Mone described what would become a common point, although the other participants offered shorter narratives, such as in the following exchange:

Nina: And the coaching we get

Mone: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Nina: Especially when situations arise whether they’re good or bad, the coaching afterwards has been very helpful. So, yeah.

Mone: Yeah. [Hearing] “here are some ways you can handle this next time” or “Oh, that was great.”

The teachers repeatedly cited the absence and desire for coaching. They also suggested that they wanted to be good at their jobs. They wanted to know how to be good at their job and were asking for coaching to help them be fruitful with students; whether for

classroom management or instructional practices, they wanted input about their instructional methods. During Focus Group 3, teacher Martinique explained she was “trying to do as much as I can on my end to help these kids succeed and I need help with that” and further, expressed the following about asking for coaching:

I know the best experiences I’ve had as a first and second year teacher have been when I had a principal come into my room. I’ve asked them to come in and to tell me what I could be doing better. Then they gave me awesome feedback, and it works the next day when I try it. So just having support to help me be the best teacher that I can be instead of just letting me just do whatever and not really care, you’re not really coming into my classroom.

Martinique added her thoughts about the need for ongoing training during the first year of teaching:

Good training, so that’s something I didn’t get to go by my first year. I think I went to one day of classroom management PD, and it wasn’t like that. It was like just ... I don’t know ... training, because we go to college or we take a test that says that we know how to be a teacher, but we don’t. We don’t know what we’re doing. We need more training on how to do stuff right, or well, at least.

Martinique’s idea that teachers are not ready to teach right out of college emphasizes the point that novice teachers’ inherent desire for coaching and mentoring. They want to know what to do, and they want to do things right. The teachers reiterated many times that the training and coaching need to be ongoing to support and preserve teachers; otherwise, teachers will get out of teaching. Martinique offered the following:

I think ... I was one of the T-TESS pilot people this year and I think that's gone through that a lot. Just having my evaluator, we'd had a goals meeting and then we had a pre-meeting before she came and observed me and she observed me and then we had a post-meeting. It was just very thorough, and I felt incredibly supported for those two months that we were going through that process.

Teacher Bahamia said, "It's not about making a top level. It's about coaching and supporting and those kinds of things." Teacher Tahiti agreed in the following detail:

So that first year, ... I thought it was gonna be intimidating, but it really wasn't. They came in even with their little laptops and made notes and then they'd send them to me. It was usually on ... It wasn't on the whole spiel. It was usually on ... They were looking for particular things, "Did you have your front of the board? How did you manage behavior?" I found that useful, but I know that's a lot. Maybe they just do that for the first-year teachers. I don't know.

Tahiti confirmed that teachers want meaningful feedback in a coaching format in order to be more successful, and not only the type of feedback that results from a performance review assessment. Teacher Puerto said the following:

Funny, because my first year I had four [feedback sessions] from my teacher certification program. Then, I had three from the ESL Academy Region 13. But I never really had any [coaching feedback] from the principal or APs. It was always ... And then this year I had none, except for my master's when the people came in, watched me teach, made recommendations. The next time I came, then they came back, ... I implement everything she recommended, and the class even

flowed better. She goes, “Wow, that was a big difference.” I was like, Wow, that was a big difference. You should come every week.”

Puerto was suggesting that receiving coaching every week could ensure all teachers become the best classroom educators imaginable. Tahiti reflected on what was helpful:

The thing that was extremely helpful was we had a behavioral specialist, and she met with a small group of six to eight teachers. Probably we needed classroom management help, I’m suspecting. She came in and observed us. Again, she said it was not evaluative, everything was generic. It was not by name. It was globally “what do the teachers need?” She came and evaluated us, and it was very data-driven. She had the little ... Y’all maybe I’ve seen this before, the pluses and minuses, like every time you give a positive feedback to a student or every time you give a negative ... Like “You need to sit down.” Anyway, she had it all mapped out, and you could see your progression and then she just added it up mathematically. I’m not even a math person. I was like, “Wow, that’s pretty cool.” You could see your progress.

Tahiti was reiterating the need for teachers to receive ongoing feedback. She also agreed with Puerto about how helpful receiving feedback was for improving so long as it was delivered in a nonthreatening way.

### **Communication**

Communication was one of the top themes noted by participants as an essential element of their profession. The theme of communication appeared 9.05% of the time for the novice teachers. Participants expressed the importance of communication in general, explicitly noting that the method and frequency of communication from school leaders



were critical; and when school leaders furnish no communication or do not communicate well, respondents felt consequentially that their job performance suffered. Teacher Madison responded about how her school's leadership communicates with its faculty sharing the following:

I feel like mine does. At faculty meetings, she definitely celebrates. We start off with attitude of gratitude. She's the one that leads it. I really like that about what she does. She'll be the first one to fess up if we're ... heading in a wrong direction as a campus and try to catch us up to speed on what the action plan would be to try to rectify that.

Teacher Aruba elaborated about how communication on her campus affects her feelings of connectedness to others:

With us, I think it's just too big that you have to find someone to connect with. Or, you're going to end up frustrated. All of the change ends up in frustration. Especially when there's no, there's no time, but there's not thorough communication. Then, individuals tend to feel even more frustrated with that. They don't really understand the why behind all the things that we're having to do.

Madison responded with, "Communication like in a timely manner where you're told the day before, 'Let's have this in.' I get that flexibility is a part of our job, but there's also about being respectable, respectful, of people's time." Madison then elaborated:

My principal does it in different ways. She really relies on her CLT team, which are the grade level leaders, to meet with her. Then, she gives them a lot of the information that she expects passed back to us. We meet as a grade level. That's

where I feel like I get the nitty gritty of her decision making. [At] faculty meetings, she'll communicate about any changes or what's happening around the campus. I get emails from her. I feel like they could be a little more. I just felt like, sometimes her emails are not as specific as they could be to let me know what I need to do. I feel like I know her on a personal, an informal, level. Just from what I've seen.

All participants agreed that communication was vital in many ways. Lack of communication, or communication that delivers unclear messages or blankets fault on whole groups causes unwarranted teacher fear, creating angst, and not knowing if they have done something wrong. The tendency of some leaders to impart blame on the entire group perpetuates fear. These types of leadership methods do not support and preserve teachers. Instead they promote instability through a climate of fear that weakens novice teachers' performance outputs and school continuity.

### **Relationships**

The teachers emphasized the importance of having their leaders treat them like people and to care about them. The theme of relationships signified 8.6% of the codes from the data. One of the teachers, put it very well sharing:

I honestly think that a lot of what we've said had come back to just relationship[s] with the teachers, just being available and being visible and ... Just letting their teachers know that they're not out to get them, they're out to help them be the best teacher that they can be.

Teacher Mone noted “all that’s really, truly being asked for you is to build relationships with these kids and make them feel like they are part of something and help them to grow.” She explained the following about getting the school’s leaders:

To build relationships with you too and get to know you as well. Not like, you know, we’re not going to be best friends, hanging out. Who would want that? But you know, just to know that like, I’m a person, you’re a person, know about each other. I have a lot of family situations last year and I feel like they knew me to the point where it’s like, I’m not ever asking for this time off unless I need it, and I ... My uncle passed away the first week of school and my grandmother passed away in February. And so, my Mom was the only surviving sibling and they were very gracious about giving me that time off to go help my Mother because she didn’t have anyone else to help plan those funerals, really. Or take care of the house and other things and it’s, it’s Abilene, Texas.

Teacher Nina shared:

One of the big things that, when it comes to building community, Mr. [Montserrat] has always stressed to us every time possible, and I still remember these conversations that I had with him in private, is making sure that the community starts in the classroom. We do those by doing our circles. When it comes to talking to the kids, high, lows, and bad sides. Scale of one to ten. How’s your day been? Anything you want to talk about. And then the little interpersonal activities where we get the kids to talk a little bit more. The way I see it, for Mr. [Montserrat], it starts there [in the classroom].

Teacher Puerto summed up the conversation as follows:

It would be, talk to us, don't dictate to us. My current principal, I remember at a staff meeting, he said, "I abhor small talk." So, he'll walk past me, I'll walk past him in the hallway; he don't say, "Hi." I don't say, "Hi." He don't wave; I don't wave. It's kind of like, "You should be asking me; don't just come talk to me when there's an issue."

One other thought Puerto shared involved not asking for "even small talk," but "just acknowledging my existence when I pass by."

This element of the relationships theme related back to the coaching theme; with participant responses substantiating their inter-relatedness such that relationships were identified as a method for affording support. The teachers discussed needing to build authentic relationships with school leaders, other teachers, and students as critical to the success of the whole school. As one teacher said, "If you want to support and retain teachers you have to care about them and want to support them as people and to be better at their profession." The statement relates to the novice teachers need for building capacity to build professional relationships with their students. Principals modeling the relationship behaviors preferred can also enable successful relationship-building because if leaders want their teachers to build positive professional relationships with students then they need to model that when they work with teachers.

### **Cooperative Team Building**

The focus group teachers wanted teachers and staff to work together to build teams that would support each other and cooperate with each other. Cooperative team building came up 6.45% of the time. Teacher Sanfrain explained the benefits of this theme about cooperation in team building:

Because we're small, I think that there is a good sense of community. I think I often feel that the issues that do arise are really petty, because if anybody's ever complaining about something happening, most of the time, I'm like, "This is ridiculous." Because if we were at the high school, we would be dealing with so many other things. It would be so much more frustrating when it comes to maybe, I don't know, dealing with another teacher or something. I don't know, those sorts of issues.

Teacher Bahamia shared the following about her understanding of teambuilding:

To put it into perspective whenever I get upset about anything here or whenever anybody gets upset, because it's just like, "You guys, this is not a big deal," because we do have a really nice community and everybody gets along, and we have monthly potluck, which is kind of like what you were talking about. It's on a voluntary basis, but we have [one] for the birthdays of all the teachers that month. You can sign up to bring something for a potluck, and all the teachers have lunch together and stuff. Occasionally, happy hours and stuff will happen too.

Teacher Martinique added:

They're trying. It's just such a big school. I know the new teacher mentor program; they've tried a lot harder to do that this year with that. I know they had happy hours at Patsy's and Starbucks, like once a month, and then we had a biweekly meeting in one of the other teachers' rooms, just like check in, and they just had cookies or donuts or something. That was fun. But that's only with mentors and new teachers. I don't know, since it's such a huge school, I don't

know how you would do it with everybody anyway. I think there's some attempt, but I know that's hard for a big school.

Teacher Clemson shared a more professional development-oriented team building approach:

We had a program where everybody even ... we stopped pulling at one time. We went into the classrooms, and we helped the teachers with the writing and grammar, to help them get it. I feel like that was helpful for the students. They try to take it and help them where they need it. We're not doing well with this, let's see what we can do to fix it [together as a team].

In Group 5, Madison said "just having a supportive team" was necessary and wanted "a team that understands, that the struggle is real, let's all go through it together." Aruba agreed, "Team, exactly." Many times, the teachers explained how they wanted others to behave, eliciting greater team cooperation and indicating that it was unprofessional of leaders to reprimand them in front of students. Others shared their tendency to rely on teammates to answer questions, to get through the day, or to lean on when stress made work untenable.

## **Resources**

The mentoring program affords the novice teachers with resources. The participants shared having a lot of appreciation for the mentoring program. Resources were revealed as 6.3% but rose to 8.74% when mentoring is added to this area of resources provided. Some participants specified that just a few years before the current school year, they had not received benefits of a mentoring program. Teacher Bahamia said the following:

Proximity matters, especially the big school. I have to agree with that as well. I think a lot of my success in my first year was because of my mentor teacher. Also, because when I initially applied, I really wanted to work at the high school, because I had subbed there and ... I felt, like I pretty much knew, the processes and how everything went, so I was ready, and this school, the OC, is so different from the high school, just procedurally in many, many ways, so trying to get to learn how to adjust, because teaching here is just so different than teaching at the high school. My mentor teacher really helped me with that, because she ... I actually took her position. She was the biology EOC teacher the years previous to me, so she really knew exactly what was going on, and she was able to walk me through that a lot. That was super helpful, I agree. The mentor teacher worked awesome.

Martinique elaborated on the benefits of the mentor program at the high school which she believed was “really good”:

I was really blessed to get a really fantastic mentor who was right next door to me. I asked her to come observe me, and she would always come over during our conference. We had lunch together almost every day just because we were right next door and got to talk through stuff, and that was incredibly helpful my first year. I know some people, like my co-teacher right now, has her mentee [who] is all the way across the school, and being [that the mentee is] in Freshman Land, it's hard to get over there sometimes. I think when the mentor program works, it works really, really well. I know it did for me.

The teachers noted that having a mentor teacher was essential to their professional development by imparting an understanding of standard school procedures. They reported that the content knowledge pairing was necessary because having a teacher in the same content area, enabled better sharing of resources applicable to the novice teachers' specific needs. They also declared their preference for having a mentor in close proximity to their classrooms as physical distance created barriers that were ineffective for learning.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

The professional learning community enabled teachers to gain support from each other, help each other build plans together, and acquire answers to fundamental questions from each other. The professional learning community theme was indicated at 4.88% among responses. Madison thought "the team helps" and elaborated as follows:

I think there's a lot of flexibility at the elementary school level, because we're already doing so much for the young kids. I think you're definitely supported by your team, which in turn is supported by your principal. I think there's a sense of wholeness there, where everybody knows that they're here to support somebody.

Teacher Puerto had many positive thoughts to share about his experiences with PLCs:

I do really like PLC time. I think that is a really good way that facilitates that well, and then I think our admin does a good job of letting it trickle down, so they'll talk to department heads, who will talk to PLC leads who will talk to ... Their PLC didn't, but I was ... like last year, was really frustrated that I didn't have autonomy in my classroom, that I had to jump into a new school. I'd never seen the curriculum, and I was told exactly how to teach what I needed to teach. I



don't know. Then I got a little bit more bold and started just saying, "Yeah, that's what I'm gonna [sic] do," and then did my own thing in class, but that didn't happen for the first couple of months, because I was terrified to do something that people were telling me not to do, but yeah, I love PLC time, and I love that we get to talk through the best way to do stuff, but when I came in, at first, I was not bold enough to say, "I don't like that, and I don't think that's how we should do it."

That can be frustrating.

Group 3's Tahiti:

And PLC ... I think we're very dynamic, and we do a lot of like, "We did that last year, but that didn't work very well, so let's try this, and definitely how is it gonna [sic] engage the students and can it be hands-on and can we have a project instead of a test, a product instead of a test?" So, I feel like that goes really well.

The novice teachers' overall responses affirmed their appreciation for receiving time to work on content with other teachers. They offered suggestions about how to make PLCs better, which included having an agenda for each meeting and pre-establishing methods for supporting the voices of both experienced, and lesser experienced teachers in the PLC. Newer teachers revealed being intimidated at first by experienced teachers and not wanting to say anything in PLC meetings, signifying an area of opportunity for PLC improvement.

### **Culture**

The theme of culture emerged thematically among the novice teachers. The culture tended to cross into the themes related to relationship building, communication,

cooperation, and team building. The teacher Bahamia shared how relationships and relationship-building affect communication and build culture:

Like I had mentioned before, we have two assemblies every day. I think they work ... In the morning, it's just to get everybody [together] ... to announce things, but also so that we can tell how everybody's feeling, if they're feeling rowdy or if they're whatever. [At] the afternoon assembly, we read all of the credits that students have earned that day, or that afternoon, the previous day. So, it's like student recognition that's really great. I like that a lot.

We also do ... I don't know if this would be considered the same thing, but we also do Student of the Month every month. It's student recognition, and we have our little TVs around the hallway, have their pictures, and for every month, the student of the month just adds to building community and supporting the students who are doing well and encouraging the other students to do the same.

Many of the novice teachers shared wanting a community or culture of positivity. Some expressed their appreciation of humor used by their leaders. They wanted a culture filled with supportive people and positive interactions to ensure that a sound, holistic environment is "all that goes on in the school."

### **Findings for the Research Questions**

The findings for each of the research questions are presented. Each research question is reiterated, followed by a detailed response that reflects the overriding themes that appear in earlier sections of this chapter.

## **Research Question 1**

The first research question asked: What can principals/school leaders provide to support and retain teachers? The responses were consistent with the literature review and the direction of the study, as teachers overwhelmingly shared their perspectives about using coaching as a tool to be the best teachers they can be. They expressed a desire for a professional work environment that advanced a community or culture centering around a collaborative team environment. They expressed aversions to working on a campus with cliques or groups that did not support or work together. They wanted to be provided with opportunities to work collaboratively, with a team mentality to best support students learning and to best preserve a successful classroom. They wanted a professional learning community that grants the time to meet to plan, collaborate, as well as learn and grow as professional educators. They wanted input from their campus leaders, but not in an open or punitive manner. They wanted to receive guidance and to grow and improve from the guidance.

Given the in-depth responses supplied by participants, a quantitative study method would have limited the opportunities for the dialogue and multi-faceted discussions that ensued amongst the respondents which enabled valuable data and insight into participants' rationale significant to this study. A survey's items would have prohibited probing opportunities for accessing participants' detailed rationales for many of their perceptions. Despite potential bias, and the inability to isolate other variables, the qualitative study bestowed more tenable responses for the researcher to consider as the focus groups setting furnished the teachers with a sense of "safety in numbers." This open dialogue, and their ability to encourage each other, and explain their perceptions

about what was desired and needed regarding support from their leaders, clarified the researchers understanding of their problems more holistically, and as they inter-relate to all themes adopted in the study. The teachers also pointed out how they wanted their schools' teachers to operate as teams overall so that their school leaders could provide coaching and learning-rich environments to all teachers. The focus groups allowed a semi-controlled setting. However it delivered the teachers a forum to analyze the questions together, and describe the type of environment in which they would like to work for becoming successful.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question asked: Do the leadership principles outlined by Marzano et al. (2005) align with novice teacher job satisfaction enough to retain teachers? This respondents' answers reflected the extension of the ideas shared by Marzano et al. (2005), with coaching being critical. The key indicator was followed by collaboration and climate, culture, or community as crucial features of an environment that would support and keep teachers. So, though there was a correlation with the 21 responsibilities of a school leader, there were also variations and additions to the 21 responsibilities, especially regarding coaching. Coaching was discussed in the forum from many perspectives; however, the respondents predominantly expressed that they wanted to have feedback in a way that was minimally punitive, as they did not want to lose their jobs. They wanted to feel supported and to learn how to get better at what they are doing to continue to teach and be successful at teaching. Teachers were frustrated as they expressed their practical experiences with limited meaningful communication regarding their performance, and lack of input to enable improving their trade or skills.

### Research Question 3

This research question asked: What are the most important pillars of the leadership responsibility matrix as they pertain to perceptions of novice teachers about retention? Based on the 21 responsibilities of a school leader, the most essential factors expressed by participants for supporting and keeping teachers would be relationships, communication, culture, and resources. More specifically, resources provided perspective, the mentoring program as a resource was a prominent theme. The words are representative of the most frequently used codes. Figure 1, shows the coaching cube as the largest.

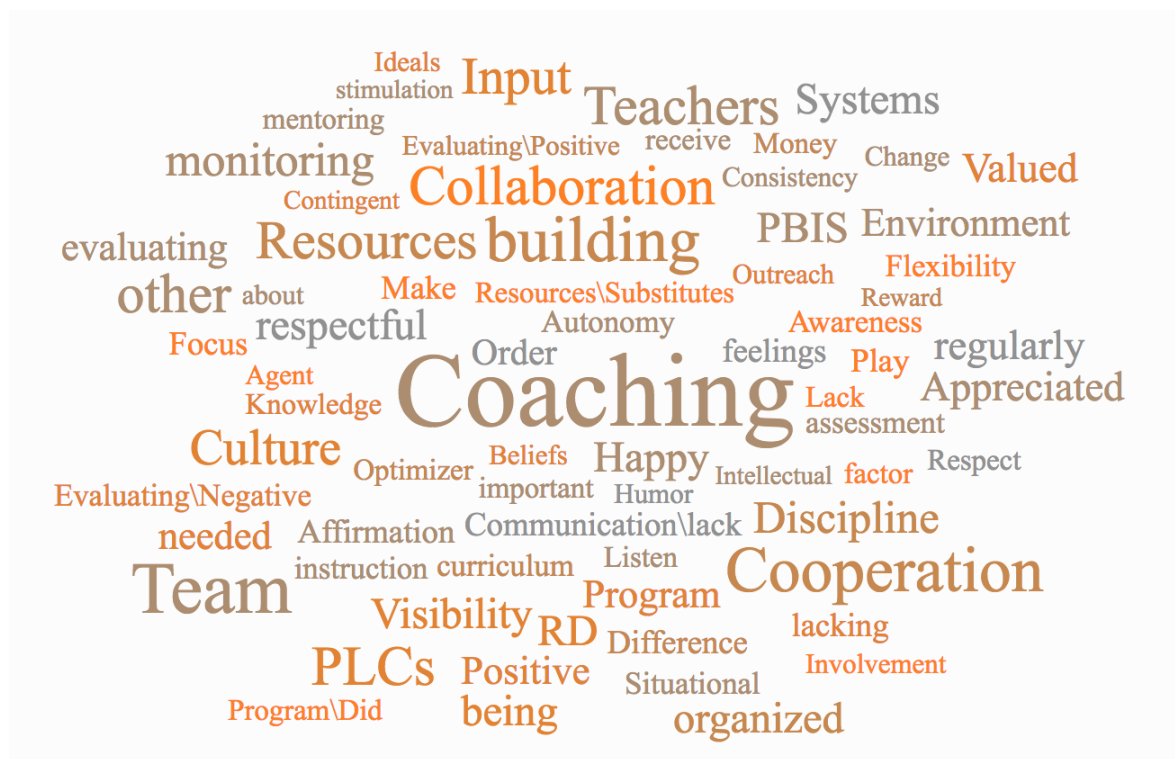


Figure 1. Word cloud for codes detected during analysis of transcripts.

The 21 responsibilities of school leaders ultimately lacked in thematic connection to the data extrapolated, even though the questions were designed to elicit information about each one of them (see question protocol in appendix A). In circumstances when

the question protocol denoted a specific responsibility, the teachers tended to repeat that term in the 21 responsibilities but also to offer genuine insight during the in-depth discussion of real situations that explained how things were handled and their preferred outcomes under different circumstances, relative to their actual experiences. The insights from their shared, real-life experiences were incredibly valuable for understanding and explaining the experiences and needs of novice teachers.

### **Summary**

The information in this study was obtained by hosting focus groups that were comprised of novice teachers and novice teachers to the district. This qualitative phenomenological study sought to garner the perceptions of teachers regarding their working environment and professional development that would ultimately promote better support and retention methods. The added interview data were valuable for checking the focus group data already obtained, and for triangulating the data to support more significant finding credibility. The research questions were answered sufficiently, and the data was carefully coded into themes that afforded a clear understanding of what novice teachers need to feel and be successful in teaching. The qualitative data suggested a possible correlative relationship between the perceived needs of the respondents and many of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders, yet the Coaching theme was well-represented as valued most among all the novice teacher participants. The discussion of the findings appears in detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to find what factors are most essential to support and retain teachers especially those new to teaching and new to a district. The study was meant to confirm in-depth if Marzano et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis of over 400 studies indicated that the 21 responsibilities of a school leader were necessary for supporting and retaining novice teachers. Determinations for how to retain teachers are necessary given an impending teacher shortage that could occur as a significant proportion of teachers are retiring and as new teachers leave the profession at an alarming rate within their first 3 to 5 years of starting teaching.

### **Summary of the Findings**

This study focused on the perceptions of teachers' working environment deficits, with a focus on novice teacher populations and what support they felt were needed to be retained. The data came from focus group sessions and interview data collected from teachers. Participation included a random sample of new or novice teachers between 5 months experience and 3 years and 9 months experience teachers. Additionally, one participant had 2 years of experience as a specialty career and technology field teacher, but also had 20 years of experience as a special education aide in a different district as a form of prior education industry experience. Two additional teachers had 2 years of experience in the district but had 7.75 years of experience in other districts. These last two teachers answered the questions related to their experiences from the perspective of a new teacher in a district, and because of their desire to participate, they hedged about explaining their years of experience at first. The researcher considered whether these more experienced teachers biased or swayed the data. However, the researcher

determined, given the teachers' status as novices in the district, their participation was useful for gaining confirmation about alignment between novice to teaching versus novice teachers to the district, which was particularly substantive relative to the emergence of the coaching theme. When more experienced teachers' comments were removed from the data, the thematic findings did not change, suggesting the teachers with experience in other districts did not bias the data.

The participants' response data demonstrated that the predominant focus for work-related performance was the coaching theme. The need to have input afforded to them in a non-punitive manner, such that the new teachers feel supported and able to grow as they develop proficiency at their trade, was also clearly communicated by the novice teachers (and was presented in Chapter 4). The top seven emerging themes are the following:

1. Coaching
2. Communication
3. Relationships
4. Cooperative Team Building
5. Resources
6. Professional Learning Communities
7. Culture

Before providing a descriptive analysis of the discussions, it is important to clarify that the other 21 responsibilities of a school leader did emerge as themes in the findings.

None of the responsibilities scored zero in connections to the emergent themes, but none of the 21 responsibilities stood out as the most significant in the data's codes.



## **Discussion**

Two issues stood out in addition to the seven themes considered. Teacher pay and student discipline were two issues that were represented in responses of supplemental themes. Those two outlying themes are discussed first, followed by the discussions about the seven major themes.

### **Teacher Pay vs. Making a Difference**

Interestingly, the novice teachers made few mentions of money, or that pay was something they needed as part of support and retention in the field. Some speculation has been discussed in the literature as to the importance of pay expectations (Imazeki, 2005). However, pay may be overrepresented in some of the reviewed research assertions. Barber and Mourshed's (2007) asserted that if pay or salary is within cost of living index, it does not play a noticeable role in keeping teachers, relative to other factors; and this premise is consistent with the group's silence regarding pay in the sessions. Imazeki (2005) found if the differential salary scales between teachers' current district versus surrounding districts is about the same as the teachers' current district, then there would not be a relationship between pay and retention. However, the issue could have been an unidentified factor of the retention situation in the current study; this study did not focus on this competitive aspect of pay. Also, some researchers have found teachers stay in the districts if they live within its borders (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005a; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987).

Commuting distance and time might affect decisions about retention for teachers with families who want to work closer to home. The commuting issue was not a component of retention addressed by this research. The district hosting the study did not

seem to have a large percentage of teachers living within the district over the past ten years. The number of teachers living in the district might be changing as the cost of living goes up within the hub of Central Texas which has been rapidly growing, causing higher home prices requiring people to seek more affordable housing. The school district is located not far from the state capital which has experienced rapid growth (Goldstein, 2017).

Overall, salary did not emerge as a consequential theme with the novice teachers, even though some of the participating teachers were second or third career teachers. Teachers commented about wanting to be in a district where they believed they could make a difference as a priority for their choice to work in the district hosting the study. The novice teachers wanted to be able to teach students not able to be successful automatically. For example, students from affluent or middle-class families might develop reading skills and vocabulary, irrespective of the learning facility, but this district had an economic disadvantage rate of 87.7% and an at-risk rate of 71.8% (TAPR, 2016), causing the novice teachers to want to help these children. Some studies reviewed suggest these factors could challenge administrators to find teachers, the participating novice teachers in the study expressed a desire to teach in the schools where the students need them most.

### **Student Discipline and Demographics of Schools**

Discipline was not significantly evident in the findings of the novice teachers' responses; however, some studies suggested that discipline may represent a challenge for overall teacher retention. Hanushek et al. (1999) had suggested that teachers would be most concerned about discipline and safety in districts serving high poverty and high

minority student populations. Although most of the teachers in the district may be white (TAPR, 2016), there was not a strong relationship to the expected discipline theme appearing in the data, even with a specific question focusing on this issue. The discussion leaned toward the benefits of a positive behavior management program and culture building program, known as positive behavior intervention, and supports (PBIS), which includes restorative discipline (RD) practices. PBIS and RD appeared in the hierarchy of themes with discipline in importance but was ranked below eight other codes that led to the seven major themes. This finding aligns with findings by Ingersol (2001) and Watlington et al. (2010) who concluded teachers, especially newer teachers, would like to work in a school with a positive culture. Culture appears to be more important early in teachers' careers than it is for veteran teachers with years of experience who might have more investment in their careers as educators.

### **Coaching**

The teachers in this study overwhelmingly expressed their opinions about coaching as a critical mechanism for schools to use in supporting and preserving teachers. Coaching, for this sample of novice teachers, defined as non-punitive input, direction, and support to facilitate growth as a professional educator. Barber and Morshed (2007), as well as Kahle and Kronebusch (2003), have concluded that coaching and support are essential in producing a satisfactory performance. Barber and Morshed (2007) connected education coaching to the apprenticeships of other professions, such as medicine and law, as well as the highly skilled trades, such as plumbing and welding. It is worth noting that all people are capable of receiving coaching and support to learn and grow while on the job in both their first 3 to 5 years and later as they become mature professionals (Barber

and Morshed, 2007). Coaching was identified as a critical tool for teacher development, based on the data obtained in the focus groups.

Individuals in other professions are not expected to know everything about their profession right out of their formal schooling. Those in other professions complete practical training, after completion of their academic programs, and they receive ample study or supervised training time to perfect their skill sets. A system of standardized practical knowledge development is mainly missing from the education profession. Additionally, considerations should be made for reducing the class loads of new teachers to enable their mentors to have time not only to view but also to discuss pedagogical issues on a regular basis (Barber & Morshed, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kahle & Kronebusch, 2003).

The participating novice teachers noted they never had time to discuss concerns about teaching practices, to observe classes together, or to have the mentors observe the mentees' classes. Considerations such as supporting reduced class sizes for teachers who mentor multiple novice teachers should be analyzed. For instance, consider how a mentor who could examine several novice teachers in their classrooms regularly, and without needing to schedule a substitute, could yield a supportive novice teacher culture. The instructional coach or mentor could work a half-class load. This kind of attention and support could produce higher retention rates for teachers with less than five years of classroom experience. Even reducing the new teachers' class loads by one class period or hour to commit time to supporting and keeping teachers through PLCs or Impact Teams (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017) in addition to the regular planning period could enable a culture of support and increase retention among effective teachers.

These adjustments could positively affect the cost-benefit analysis for keeping teachers by using supplementary resources and time to support novice teachers via meeting with coaches during the school day, immersion in teacher induction, and knowledge building time within the school day among novice teachers (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). Watlington et. al. (2010) reported Florida's Broward County Public Schools produced a lower teacher attrition rate and higher teacher retention rate based on funding the supports necessary to ensure its teacher induction system was successful.

### **Communication**

The novice teachers proposed that communication is a significant, contributory theme to their work. Much of what their discussion focus entailed was personal, directed communication for understanding, not blanket staff-wide distribution. They also expressed thoughts about how teachers were or were not communicated with by their schools' leaders/administrators. The novice teachers wanted to know they were doing a good job; they wanted to be told how they were doing in their job in a nonpunitive way that would help them improve. Busteed (2014) pointed out for anyone to continue in their work, they need to see success at least for a small segment of every day. Some of the novice teachers did not know what to do with all-staff emails that administrators sent to all teachers directing a correction was needed in class supervision, following of school policy, or something else. The novice teachers reported becoming worried and unsure if these all-staff emails were intended to be directed at them specifically and whether they were one of the teachers on staff doing things incorrectly. Not only were messages like these not received well, the novice teachers found them confusing; more concerning

among the data was the statement by many participants that this form of communication was the only method their administrators and school leaders used.

This communication issue affects the theme of coaching. The novice teachers wanted to have specific individualized feedback that was focused on what they needed to correct with clear expectations for how to change their actions. The en masse and demotivating communications seemed to occur as corrections and left the novice teachers confused about if they were doing their jobs correctly or efficiently. The novice teachers needed structure just like apprentices in any other industry in which explicit and supportive direction allows for discussion to ensure understanding and skill building. Much like the feedback and direction administrators want teachers to give their students to ensure understanding and to make sure all students are learning according to curricular learning intentions.

### **Relationships**

Teachers want to be a part of a community as well as to know they are valued and connected with others in a school's community. This theme supports Maslow's (1943) hierarchical level of belongingness. When the novice teachers experienced acceptance and belonging to the group, they gained a sense of support as well.

The participating novice teachers had varied experiences with relationships in their working environments. Some teachers specified their administrators efficiently stopped gossip and inappropriate talk the moment it started. Other teachers said their administrators were not involved at that level and might not have been aware of any undercurrents fueling negative communication. This lack of involvement in communication did not enable administrators to lead within connected, relationship-rich

environments. Instead, the administrators' lack of knowledge about the staff's relationships, or lack of attempts to connect teachers in their schools caused teachers to be unclear about expectations, not connected to each other, and unable to be genuinely supportive of each other as a community. Teachers expressed their connectedness efforts by discussing how they rely on each other for support when enabled by their administrators. When the schools' leaders created and supported environments valuing connections and relationships, teachers reported having ample support when faced with struggles or challenges.

### **Cooperative Team Building**

Teachers in the study found cooperation and team building to be significant. Teachers valued having other teachers they could rely on and go to for asking questions during their struggles. Team members supported teachers even when their administrators could not be available to support them. The creation of an environment that enabled people to "play team" caused a fulfilling and supportive environment in which all teachers could invest in the success of all students. Teachers appreciated cooperation in the team and found pitting the teachers against each other in a competitive way to be counterproductive. This finding is in line with the ideas shared by Bloomberg and Pitchford (2017); when teachers work together, they build efficacy across the campus and within the teacher teams to efficiently serve all students. Cooperative team building functions counter to competitive team building in which teachers compare each other's student data in an adversarial relationship instead of in a supportive spirit of edification.

The novice teachers wanted to enjoy their workplace as part of a cooperative team and work in a supportive community that appreciates their efforts. This finding supports

Miller's (2010) evidence for teachers, especially new teachers, needing to not stress about joining a new workplace and having good attitudes about their work because learning the practice of teaching has enough stressors on its own. Miller (2010) also found a dichotomy in which leaders afford and enable the supportive balanced work environment, or they do not. When leaders fail to facilitate a supportive environment with engaging team building, teacher attrition is higher.

## **Resources**

The critical element defining the teachers' reference to resources was the mentoring program. Some of the novice teachers shared about receiving a mentor, and others indicated they did not have a mentor. The mentoring program, as facilitated by the district, operated at variable levels of fidelity within the district for approximately two or more years before the school year when the data for this study was collected. Thus, novice teachers to the district over the past two years had experienced mentorship, but teachers who were in their third year in the district might not have experienced consistency in mentorship, particularly during their first year.

Some of the teachers reported being paired with a mentor who taught a similar subject but not their specific subject area. Some also noted that a friend of theirs who was new to the district had a mentor, but the mentor's classroom was physically across the building and the novice teacher and mentor did not have opportunities for consistently meeting unless they met after the school day. These data suggest considering the locations of the mentors' and mentees' classroom and specific subjects they teach as important to producing a successful mentor-mentee pairing. The proximity of the mentor



as a resource is critical for new teachers trying to learn curriculum in addition to the nuances of school culture and pedagogy.

Oliver's (2016) findings of mentors' and mentees' need for proximity, and matching the subject taught was supported by the data from the novice teacher focus groups. Thus, subject area matching and proximity are critical for ensuring new teachers experience support and commitment to the profession. New teachers are learning about their profession, new environments, content areas' curricula, how to support and align with students' needs and gaps in prior learning, as well as pedagogy. Endowing support leads to better environments for keeping good teachers according to the sample of this study.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

The teachers said PLCs are necessary. PLCs support a culture of collaboration and coaching as well as to serve as a resource for ongoing learning and support. The novice teachers wanted to become masters of the craft of teaching and to be part of a team of professionals working on a common goal of guiding students toward academic success. Their desire to work in a team, to grow and support each other, and to teach, so learning occurs for kids was commendable and suggested they could generate paths to success for all their students. The benefits of granting time during the school day for PLCs should be considered imperative to educational leaders seeking to ensure students receive the best chance to learn the curricula within every grade. Additionally, consideration for PLC's aligned to supporting collective efficacy as Bloomberg and Pitchford (2017) recommend in their book *Impact Teams* aligns perfectly with the coaching and support teachers seek and need from each other.

Bloomberg and Pitchford (2017) define collective efficacy as the result of collaborating overtime efficiently, that results in collective beliefs in the group's strength to effect positive change. They imply that this collaborative team effort causes knowledge building, as well as feelings of optimism, confidence, and resiliency as students and teachers both, find success. Adjusting the notion of comparing “your” students versus “my” students’ data, into our students as a collective campus team, makes a huge difference in teachers feeling like they are not alone. They are working towards all students’ success together. The collective effort results in teachers feeling successful, supported, and teachers then want to stay in the schools that support this type of culture.

## **Culture**

The entire culture of a school is built on the philosophy and practices of the school’s leader. Schools’ leaders lay the foundation for what behavior and learning are promoted and permitted. School leaders can offer positive feedback about accomplishments and focus attitudes toward a team mentality while also tackling or redirecting variations from practice that does not support the goal or vision directly. Interestingly, group attendees did not specify they wanted teachers who deviated from the vision to receive punitive responses. The novice teachers just wanted variations away from the mission, and team mentality attended to so that they would know what following the vision or making progress toward the goal should look.

Therefore, the novice teachers preferred that all members of the team could work in a culture that valued coaching and respect. They wanted to work in a culture in which team effort was desired and appreciated and where all staff wants to support each other and allow all to be part of the community or team. The novice teachers were specific

about not wanting to deal with gossip or negative talk in the school environment and about appreciating school leaders who dealt with negativity right away.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings suggest there are opportunities for school leaders to support and retain teachers. The following implications for practice could be valuable tools for supporting and sustaining teachers, and in particular, novice teachers:

- Leaders should afford a coaching rich environment in which teachers receive non-punitive direction and support
- Leaders should create a culture valuing team effort and an atmosphere in which all teachers and staff actively help all students
- Leaders should create a culture in which the supports for continuous growth in a learning organization include time during the school day for teachers to collaborate and build relationships
- Leaders should prepare communication that is specific to the targeted recipients, excluding those to whom the message does not apply, in an effort to coach teachers toward improvement and success
- Mentoring program leaders should pair mentor teachers and their mentees teachers by content area, grade level, and physical proximity in order to ensure constant support and communication occur
- Educational leaders must strategically plan how to interact with novice teachers in a positive, proactive way seeking first to understand before being understood.

### **Recommendations for future research**

The research findings yielded other possible areas of investigation regarding how to improve teacher retention rates. The research recommendations are the following:

- Continued review of how and how well new teacher induction and novice teacher mentoring programs support and retain teachers is needed on a larger scale, such as by state or nationally.
- A cost-benefit analysis could show data about the effectiveness of how the cost of offering time during the school day to allow novice teachers and mentors to work together affects the cost of teacher turnover thus justifying the cost of added periods off and perhaps more staff to support the retention efforts.
- A study of the impact of enabling novice and mentor teachers to observe in each other's classrooms as part of the cycle of coaching and support could produce data with implications for turnover, student achievement, and best practices in pedagogy. Furthermore, this research might help school districts' leaders understand the relevance and plausible application of giving time during the day for coaching for new teachers without negatively impacting annual budgets or to show how such efforts can lead to reductions in recruitment budget expenditures.

## **Appendix A: Focus Group Questions**

### **Novice Teacher Perspectives- What Leaders can do to Retain Teachers**

#### **Comfort Setting Questions**

1. What grade(s) and/or subject(s) do you teach?
2. How long have you worked in teaching in this district?
3. Why did you choose the district or school?
4. What is your ideal school environment?

#### **Overview Question**

5. What can principal's/school leadership provide to support and retain teachers?

#### **Specific Questions**

##### *Affirmation, Contingent Rewards*

6. Do you feel your principal recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures? Explain how/give examples?

##### *Change Agent, Flexibility*

7. How does your school leader respond to challenges or changes?

##### *Communication, Culture*

8. How does your school leader communicate? With staff, with teachers, with students, with parents? Is the communication working? Why or why not?
9. Do you feel your leadership builds community & cooperation within the school environment?

##### *Discipline, Culture, Order*

10. How is discipline handled on your campus? Do you feel safe? Do you feel overall the campus feels like and is a safe place for students and staff based on your leader's direction?

##### *Flexibility, Situational Awareness*

11. Explain a situation that your leadership handled where there were disagreements, new ideas expressed, or dissenting opinions?
12. How does your leader handle undercurrents? What is the message you can hear your leader directing in difficult as well as good situations?

*Input*

13. When and how are teachers involved in implementation of decisions, policies, practices, and or expectations for the campus?

*Ideals/Beliefs, Outreach, Optimizer*

14. What is the focus or goal/s of your school? How do you know the goals/focus?

*Involvement and Knowledge in Curriculum and Instruction*

15. How does your school leadership provide or facilitate curriculum, instruction and assessment practices and knowledge building on the campus? Explain your example.

*Monitoring/Evaluating*

16. How are learning, teaching, or program implementation monitored and supported?

*Order*

17. What are examples of normal procedures on your campus? Are they working? Why or why not? Explain.

*Resources, Input, Optimizer, Intellectual Stimulation*

18. What supports are you as a new or newish teacher provided? Are these supports helping you or is there something else you need?
19. How does your leader assist you with obtaining materials and professionally developing?
  - a. Are you able to receive professional learning and growth opportunities?
  - b. Are you able to receive feedback informally? How?

*Visibility, Relationships, Outreach*

20. Give examples of what your leader does on a day to day basis.
21. How does your leader know and interact with teachers, students, parents, community? Give examples.

These questions were approved by the University of Texas at Austin for use in a focus group study.

Spring 2017.

## Appendix B: Codes by Responsibilities' Categories

Nodes	<i>n</i> for Coding References	One of the 21 Responsibilities of a School Leader	21 Responsibilities of a School Leader Descriptions
Coaching	163	No	
Communication	115	Yes	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students
Relationships	109	Yes	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff
Cooperation Team Building	82	No	
Resources	81	Yes	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs
Professional Learning Communities	62	No	
Culture	53	Yes	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation
Input	46	Yes	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies
Discipline	43	Yes	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus
Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) and Restorative Discipline (RD)	37	No	
Systems, Being Organized, Respectful	36	No	
Visibility	36	Yes	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students
Valued and Appreciated regularly	33	No	
Resources\Mentoring Program	30	No	
Monitoring Evaluating	29	Yes	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning
Positive Happy Environment Needed	29	No	
Order	24	Yes	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines

Nodes	<i>n</i> for Coding References	One of the 21 Responsibilities of a School Leader	21 Responsibilities of a School Leader Descriptions
Play Team	18	No	
Communication\Lack of Communication	17	No	
Resources Lacking	17	No	
Affirmation	15	Yes	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failure
Focus	15	Yes	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention
Make a Difference	15	No	
Autonomy	13	No	
Monitoring Evaluating\Negative Feelings of Monitoring and Evaluating	13	No	
Situational Awareness	13	Yes	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems
Flexibility	12	Yes	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
Lack of Input	10	No	
Money as a Factor, Not Important if Happy	10	No	
Listen	9	No	
Optimizer	9	Yes	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	8	Yes	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
Resources\Mentoring Program\Did not Receive Mentoring Program	8	No	
Resources\Substitutes	8	No	



Nodes	<i>n</i> for Coding References	One of the 21 Responsibilities of a School Leader	21 Responsibilities of a School Leader Descriptions
Respect	8	No	
Ideals Beliefs	7	Yes	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
Outreach	7	Yes	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders
Change Agent	6	Yes	Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo
Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	6	Yes	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
Humor	5	No	
Consistency	4	No	
Monitoring Evaluating\Positive Feelings About Monitoring and Evaluating	4	No	
Contingent Reward	3	Yes	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments
Intellectual Stimulation	2	Yes	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture

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