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## Fighting on the Frontline: An Examination of Teacher Retention Practices in Urban Elementary Schools

Kelley J. Young

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FIGHTING ON THE FRONTLINE: AN EXAMINATION OF TEACHER RETENTION  
PRACTICES IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

KELLEY J. YOUNG

(Under the Direction of Brenda Marina)

ABSTRACT

For many teachers employed in schools in metro Atlanta, meeting the demands of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top is complicated by social realities characterized by the urban environment. Teachers' beliefs about learning, operationalized at either the individual or the collective level, are influenced by the context of the schools in which they teach, and when teaching in the urban context, it is critical that teachers believe students can learn despite their circumstances (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 2009). The purpose of schools is to ensure academic achievement for children despite age, creed, color, race, or religion; however, students in urban or inner-city environments are not performing as well as their suburban counterparts. High levels of teacher attrition and turnover in urban areas are contributing to lower levels of achievement in students residing in urban areas and impacted by poverty.

This mixed-methods study combined teacher questionnaire data with focus group data to determine the perspective of urban teachers as it related to teacher retention. The study sought to identify if principals influence urban teacher retention and to analyze attributes, characteristics, and behaviors of urban principals which may have an effect on teacher retention.

The overall findings of this study were that principals do have an influence on urban teacher retention which can be either positive or negative. Additionally, several positive

attributes, characteristics, and behaviors were identified which influence urban teachers positively to continue teaching in urban environments.

**INDEX WORDS:** Urban Schools, Urban Principals, Teacher Retention

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Elaine J. Collins. Because God created you to be my earthly mother, my role model, and my guardian angel, I have been able to continue your legacy of love, laughter, strength, and kindness. It is because of the example you set, I have been able to muster the commitment necessary to complete this work. Through this process, I have found that you are my greatest motivation and I am honored to be able to call myself your child. I love you for an eternity and I hope that I have made you proud.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God, for it is through Him that I know I can do all things, and with Him on my side, nothing can stand in my way. He is my light, my truth, and the reason I was able to complete this work. To all who have pushed and supported me in completing this work, I am thankful. My children, Elan and Kaden, have been patient and deserve the absolute best; this work is a clear depiction of my love for them.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Present-day American education is consistently being scrutinized and examined from a public lens through political views, technological advancements, and the many aspects of contemporary media. The constant exposure and political influence on the American school system has led to the advancement of educational reform, increased educational research, and a growing number of educational consultants. Educational reform is often characterized by issues, concerns, and problems associated with urban, and low socioeconomic schools (Auerbach, 2007; Horgan, 2009; McLoyd, 1998; Snipes & Casserly, 2004; Swain, 2006). The urban context is one in which there is persistent stress imposed by intensely concentrated social realities. Although all schools face some form of social reality, the urban school is at the convergence of an array of social concerns. Urban realities such as poverty, diversity, violence, and identity matters are present in the urban classroom which should have great influence on how pedagogy is developed and implemented (Cheek & Ortlieb, 2008). Urban schools can be typified not only as an institution of learning but also as a social agency. Recently, there has been a push in education towards multiculturalism and diversity; however, there has been very little focus placed upon the needs of the urban learner and even less research exists on the urban leader. Principals play a key role in the academic progress of students (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Kaplan, Ownings, & Nunnery, 2005) and require proper training in effective leadership practice. For leaders working in the urban context, this is paramount due to challenges such as poverty and other urban realities. Educational leadership programs which specialize in urban issues are scarce; 80% of Americans live in metropolitan areas and send their children to urban schools (Ylimaka, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2007).

The majority of social issues experienced by urban school personnel are intricately intertwined, can be very complex, and often lead to premature staff burnout and mobility (Ingersoll, 2001a; Neild, Useem, & Farley, 2005). School administrators bear the responsibility of recruiting and retaining teachers; additionally, they are expected to demonstrate the expertise needed to lead and support teachers in a manner which will increase teacher retention rates (Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005). Teacher attrition, turnover, and mobility are major concerns for schools across the nation. Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) found that 450,000 teachers left the classroom in 2000. Reports conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics further suggested that 525,000 teachers either changed positions, or left the profession altogether in the 2008-2009 school year. Similar research suggested an image of the teaching profession as a “revolving door,” an occupation in which there are relatively large flows in, through, and out of schools. In recent years, this “revolving door” image partly accounted for student enrollment increases or teacher retirement (Ingersoll, 2001b). Ingersoll and Smith (2004) later found that recruitment and training of teachers is not the only solution to answering the teacher shortage problem. In fact, it might be more beneficial to address some of the organizational issues identified by teachers leaving the profession in an effort to decrease the teacher turnover rate exhibited. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) further noted that there are significant effects of school and organizational characteristics on turnover which have been overlooked by previous research.

Student achievement is a centralized function of school and academic progress necessitates dedicated, knowledgeable, and passionate teachers. Due to the diverse social realities faced by urban students, the need for high quality teachers is heightened. Teacher turnover, attrition, and mobility in urban schools are maintaining, if not widening, the

achievement gap between economically disadvantaged inner-city schools and their suburban counterparts, resulting in lower-levels of achievement (English, 2002; Sandy & Duncan, 2010; Talbert-Johnson, 2004). According to Guin (2004), turnover rates in urban schools are double those in rural and suburban areas. This suggests that urban school leaders should be well equipped to recruit and hire qualified personnel, but more importantly, they must be able to retain them.

This work is especially important and dear to my heart for a host of reasons. Not only was I raised in an urban setting, I have chosen to be an urban educator and administrator. These experiences have fueled my passion and desire to help pave the way for meaningful education for urban children. Having experienced the hardships and oftentimes callousness of urban education from both the student and educator's perspectives, I know firsthand that students in urban schools need the best and brightest educators and teachers. For urban students, the odds are often stacked against them as they may be living in poverty with uneducated parents or role models who can greatly impact their academic success. I am a true testament that urban education can work; however, I have also seen the ineffectiveness and counterproductive results of an urban education for others. As an urban educator, I have worked diligently to ensure that urban students receive an education comparable to the ones their suburban counterparts receive, and have simply decided that in effort to do this, work needs to be done not only in the teaching arena but also in the area of administration. It takes a special and unique soul to teach and lead in the urban environment—one who is knowledgeable and sensitive to urban needs, yet patient and steadfast in the belief that all children can learn and succeed despite their economic status, racial makeup, or negative pervasiveness throughout their community. I have seen urban teachers and administrators that are exceptional at doing just this as well as those who have



fallen short. Therefore, my life's work and career have been dedicated to ensuring that urban students get a fair chance and that society no longer remains oblivious to their needs. Students educated in urban communities deserve the same educational opportunities as those of middle- to upper-class communities because urban students' experiences in school may be their only ticket out of poverty, as it was mine.

### Overview of the Literature

#### Theoretical Framework

The Transformative Learning Theory by Jack Mezirow (1991) was used to undergird this study. The Transformative Learning Theory is defined by Clark (1993) as learning that induces more far-reaching change in the learner than other kinds of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the learner and produce a significant impact or paradigm shift in the learner's subsequent experiences. As this theory was designed for adult learners, it was appropriate for the current study because the urban leader is generally responsible for arranging, and many times facilitating, professional learning opportunities for teachers. When leaders are effective, they not only model expected behavior, they are able to teach and lead teachers into new ideas, concepts, and experiences related to school and current trends in educational research and theory. Three major themes typify this theory: (a) experience, (b) critical reflection, and (c) rational discourse. Critical reflection is the component most considered when working with adult learners, as it allows one to question his/her understanding of the world around them (Mezirow, 1991). Teachers often take on the role of learner in an academic setting, specifically one beset by the urban environment. The urban principal serves as the leader in this type of learning for the teacher and should serve as the bridge between teacher and student relationships. The urban setting can pose challenges for new teachers or those who have not been exposed to

the realities of the urban school context such as poverty, class differences, and cultural beliefs/understandings.

### Urban School Context

Instruction delivered in urban environments reaching poverty stricken minority students necessitates certain characteristics. Testing and achievement data reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2000) indicated that urban minority students have specific needs which are not being met by traditional curricula and instructional strategies. Students in these areas respond much more to teachers who are warm demanders. Ware (2006) defined the term warm demanders as effective, culturally responsive teachers. Warm demanders frequently implement direct instruction, inquiry, and computer-enhanced instructional practices are strong disciplinarians and care givers, incorporate culture into lessons, adapt instruction to meet the needs of students, and have high standards and expectations for their students. Ware found that the characteristics of a warm demander were significantly more effective in the academic achievement of poor, urban minority students than those who were not warm demanders.

Cheek and Ortlieh (2008) conducted a study seeking to understand how urban environments and classroom instruction play a role in academic achievement, concentrating on low socioeconomic schools. In particular, they considered why schools in urban settings continue to fail to meet the expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). According to Cheek and Ortlieh, teachers in urban schools have very little familial connections with students and tend to manage student behavior by holding students directly responsible for their actions, as opposed to consistently making familial or parental contact. In addition, urban teachers were found to require more individual tasks than cooperative work, and at times, even prevented students from working together to complete assignments. Cheek and Ortlieh's study indicated

that teachers in urban settings approach instruction differently when compared to teachers in rural or suburban settings. This is pertinent to note for urban school leaders when recruiting, hiring, and training teachers. Urban teachers must be able to address the specific needs of the urban student while delivering instruction that is meaningful and long lasting.

Poverty impacts academic achievement and imposes certain constraints on a student's readiness to learn. Burney and Beilke (2008) conducted a meta-analysis on the constraints of poverty on academic achievement. The researcher's found that students from lower income families may have limited access to programs outside of school that provide lesson and enrichment opportunities that add to competence in a learning environment, confidence in ability to learn new things, social interaction skills, and background information that may transfer into an academic setting (Burney & Beilke 2008). Children impacted by poverty are more likely to live in environments with high crime rates, live in abusive or dysfunctional homes, and suffer from a lack of parental environment (Swain, 2006). These environmental problems can lead to problems in the classroom. Teachers need to be equipped with instructional strategies which counteract the negative effect poverty in the urban environment may pose on academic progress.

#### The Urban Teacher

Urban school teacher burnout, turnover, and mobility. Statistics reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2000) show that 9.3% of teachers leave the profession prior to completing their first year, 20% exit the profession within the first three years, and the percentage increases to 30% by the end of the fifth year. Teacher attrition is costly due to budgeting for new teacher recruitment and training (Brown & Wynn, 2007). Alarming, turnover rates are even higher for teachers working in urban schools. Teacher turnover rates in urban, high-poverty schools are 50% higher than low-poverty American schools (Ingersoll,

2001a). According to Freeman, Scafidi, and Sjoquist (2002), teachers who move to different schools are more likely to have served in a low-performing urban school. Factors such as salary, quality of teaching preparation, and working conditions have been found as causes of high turnover rates (Dove, 2004; Guin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001b). Teacher attrition may play an important role in the disparities of educational opportunities offered to students across schools; furthermore, schools that have high turnover rates may be expected to have low-performing teachers (Freeman, Scafidi, & Sjoquist, 2002).

Research conducted by Ingersoll (2001c) indicates significant effects of school and organizational characteristics on turnover which have been overlooked by previous research and theory. Recruitment programs alone will not solve school staffing problems because teacher retention must also be addressed. Teacher retention is a key factor in decreasing the turnover rate in schools, especially those in the urban context. Retention of effective teachers—teachers who have demonstrated valuable teaching capacity through student achievement data—is more difficult for urban schools than for suburban schools because the urban school serves poor and minority children and frequently has limited funds for teacher salaries, educational materials, and general maintenance of the school environment. For urban teachers, subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge are only a part of what is needed; teachers must be able to build relationships with their students. In addition, urban teachers must be able to work with “burned-out” colleagues in dysfunctional urban school bureaucracies and be able to relate to a highly culturally diverse set of parents and caregivers (Stotko, Ingram, & Beaty-O’Ferrall, 2007). Good working conditions have been identified as having a positive impact on teacher retention, and school leadership provides and supports good working conditions for teachers. This is why

further research is needed regarding urban principals and the role they play in retaining quality teachers in an urban context.

The urban leader and teacher retention. All schools face some sort of challenge and adversity but inner-city schools seem to struggle greatly when it comes to staff turnover, student mobility, and academic achievement. Riley (2009) wrote that the urban school leader faces two interconnected community-related challenges: making sense of changes and complexities, and understanding more about the community in which they serve. It is necessary for students in urban settings to be exposed to a multicultural perspective to learning, especially when there is a growing number of educators and administrators who do not share the same culture. Students need to feel their culture is legitimate and relevant not only within the educational experiences but also in society (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, & Anderson, 2009).

Erwin, Winn, Gentry, and Cauble (2010) compared leadership skills among urban, suburban, and rural leaders and noted that urban principals face some unique challenges. Most urban environments employ inexperienced teachers, have an increasing number of dropout or transient students, and eventually lose students (and subsequently funding) to charter schools. After conducting a meta-analysis of statewide test scores of 284 urban schools and principal rankings, Erwin et al. (2010) suggested that the highest variation of leadership style was between urban and suburban principals based on the community and economic status of students. Their research indicated that urban principals must make an attempt to counteract the social issues impacting the achievement of their students.

#### Statement of the Problem

For many teachers employed in schools in metro Atlanta, meeting the demands of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top is complicated by social realities characterized by the

urban environment. Teachers' beliefs about learning, operationalized at either the individual or the collective level, are influenced by the context of the schools in which they teach, and when teaching in the urban context, it is critical that teachers believe students can learn despite their circumstances (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade 2009). The purpose of schools is to ensure academic achievement for children despite age, creed, color, race, or religion; however, students in urban or inner-city environments are not performing as well as their suburban counterparts. High levels of teacher attrition and turnover in urban areas are contributing to lower levels of achievement in students residing in urban areas and impacted by poverty. A teacher retention report published by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement in Georgia (2010) revealed that although teachers in Georgia have a higher retention rate than the national average, the Atlanta metropolitan area had significantly lower retention rates than their rural counterparts. Teachers in the metro area were reported as having a retention rate of 58.7% over a period of 10 years, while teachers in rural areas were being retained at a rate of 72.7%. This indicates that teachers in the Atlanta area are experiencing something unique, causing them to leave the profession, or transfer into other positions more frequently. According to Ingersoll and Smith (2004), data suggest reasons behind teacher shortages and turnover largely reside in working conditions fostered within schools and districts. This data further suggest district level and building level administrators have an effect on the decision of urban teachers to leave or stay in their positions based on working conditions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine teacher retention practices implemented by urban school leaders.

## Research Questions

### Quantitative Research Questions (Rq), Null Hypotheses, and Alternative Null Hypotheses

The quantitative research questions were designed to identify whether new and veteran teachers have the same experiences related to the challenges they face, learning experiences/ professional development opportunities, and demographics/diversity of the urban schools they are employed.

Rq1: What is the difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience?

Ho1: There is no statistical significant difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience.

Ho1a: There is a statistical significant difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience.

Rq2: What is the difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience?

Ho2: There is no statistical significant difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience.

Ho2a: There is a statistical significant difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience.

Rq3: What is the difference between demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience?

Ho3: There is no statistical significant difference between demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience.

Ho3a: There is a statistical significant difference between school demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience.

#### Qualitative Research Questions (RQ)

Existing literature and research extensively covers characteristics of the urban school environment, leader, and teacher turnover rates. Moreover, the research demonstrates a correlation between the effects of the urban context, urban leader, and urban teacher turnover rates and academic achievement. Much research has been conducted on recruiting and hiring teachers but there is limited research on retention practices, specifically practices implemented in the urban area. The intention of this research study was to examine teacher retention practices implemented by urban school leaders.

Due to the concentration of social issues in urban areas such as poverty, low readiness skills, and parental involvement, schools are challenged with meeting the demands of school reform efforts while addressing the many social issues urban students bring to the classroom. This can cause teachers to burn out more quickly, resulting in higher levels of attrition and turnover. Likewise, urban principals need to be prepared to counteract high turnover with proven teacher retention strategies. Therefore, the overarching qualitative research question developed to provide focus for this study was:

RQ1. What personal and professional behaviors do urban principals exhibit which may contribute to high levels of teacher retention and stability?

The following supporting qualitative research questions also guided the research:

RQ2. What is the association between the challenges faced by urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?



- RQ3. What is the association between the professional development opportunities provided to urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?
- RQ4. What is the association between urban school demographics/diversity and teacher retention rates?
- RQ5. What are teachers' perception of principal's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding teacher retention?

### Importance of the Study

Conducting a study regarding successful retention of urban teachers may provide additional resources to policy makers and urban leaders with reducing the turnover rate in urban schools. Research shows that the single most school-based influential factor in the classroom is the teacher (Talbert-Johnson, 2004; English, 2002; Sandy & Duncan, 2010) and urban students deserve teachers who are qualified, committed, and well versed in educating them. According to Payne (1996), urban students respond well academically when they are allotted the opportunity to build meaningful and trusting relationships with the adults in their life, and in many cases, school is the only chance this may happen for them. Teacher turnover rates contribute to low levels of student achievement in urban schools. This study was important because it provided empirically-based evidence to further the body of research on urban school teacher retention. The study aimed to address urban teacher perspectives concerning what principals can do to encourage and motivate teachers to remain in the urban environment despite the challenges they face.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study was a mixed-method study that implemented both qualitative and quantitative research methods. A review of quantitative studies about a particular phenomenon combined with a review of qualitative studies can provide richer insights and raise more interesting questions for future research than if only one set of studies is considered (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Although the majority of the data collected was a result of quantitative research methods, the implementation of qualitative data collection methods added to the level of validity of the results and is further discussed in Chapter 3.

### Sampling Procedures

The researcher solicited the participation of seven elementary school principals and their teachers (approximately 20-30 teachers per school) working in an urban school district in a southeastern region of the United States. Participants were selected from a population of over 50 elementary schools with teachers of varied years of experience and education. Elementary schools were chosen because they are the foundation of learning. It is where the educational path of students begins, therefore, setting the foundation for learning. Elementary teachers can set the tone for a student's academic career, making the learning experience exciting and interesting, or not. The convenience sampling technique was utilized for the study; however, purposeful, homogenous sampling techniques were implemented as well. Gall et al. (2007) defined purposeful sampling as the process of selecting cases that are likely to be "information-rich" with respect to the purposes of a qualitative research study. Similarly Gall et al. explained that homogeneous sampling includes a group of cases that are similar because they represent one defined point of variation in the phenomenon being studied. The teachers selected came from

schools that possess shared characteristics related to school demographics such as Title I Status, 75% or more students receiving free/reduced lunch, and needs improvement status on standardized test scores.

The principals were contacted and asked permission to allow the study to be conducted at their campus. Initially, contact was made via e-mail and follow-up correspondence was implemented after a two week response time passed. Follow-up correspondence was made via telephone calls or face-to-face invitations. After an initial approval of principals, teachers were asked to participate via staff e-mail. Teacher surveys were conducted in staff meetings. Data collected from these surveys were analyzed and participants were solicited to serve as participants in a focus group for further data collection. Focus groups were held with teachers away from the school campus to expound on quantitative data collected.

#### Instrumentation

Teacher participants completed a survey obtained from Claudine Sarpy-Simpson (2005) in her research regarding teacher retention in urban environments. The teacher questionnaire utilized a Likert Scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree aimed at determining teachers' perceptions about principal leadership practices in the urban environment. The survey was designed to identify principal behaviors which inspire teacher job satisfaction that leads to their desire to remain in the profession. The questionnaire included the following areas of interest: (a) challenges faced by urban educators, (b) professional development opportunities, and (d) diversity/student demographics. The goal of the survey was to determine if teachers were intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to continue teaching in urban schools, and specifically, if the building level administrator played a key role, if any, in their decision to continue teaching urban students.

A focus group as defined by Gall et al. (2007) is a type of interview involving an interviewer and a group of research participants who are free to talk with and influence each other in the process of sharing their ideas and perceptions about a defined topic. The two focus groups included six individuals and the interview questions were semistructured and conversational. The purpose of this focus group was to expound upon the experiences of urban elementary school teachers and their perceptions of the principal's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding teacher retention. Additionally, the conversations were organized around guided questions that described urban elementary school experiences and how these experiences affected the urban leader.

#### Data Analysis

The survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential analysis to describe and determine teacher attitudes about their principal's role (if any) in their decision to remain teaching in the urban environment. The survey data were loaded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0, for analysis. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the comparative analysis between the independent variables (challenges faced, professional development, and demographics/diversity) and dependent variable (years of experience). Data obtained during the focus group were transcribed by the researcher and interpreted based on the notes and narratives generated during the protocol analysis and a predetermined coding system. Prior to the focus groups, the researcher devised a category system to code data based on the research questions. Transcripts from the focus groups were reviewed in search of patterns, relationships, and themes. This open coding system was implemented in two phases in an effort to highlight patterns and themes as they related to the

predetermined categories/themes which were aligned directly to the research questions designed for the study. This data were used to further expound on quantitative data collected.

### Delimitations

This study included only one geographical area of the United States and one urban school district. Because the study sample was convenience-based for the researcher, the study was located in the southeastern region of the United States. Schools selected to participate in the study were based on Title I status—schools with 75% or above of students receiving free and reduced lunch and a high level of minority students. Elementary schools were invited to participate as long as they met the urban school criteria as defined by this study. While exploring different regions of urban schools would have been beneficial, and would have added to the generalizability of the results, it was not conducive for this research because of travel and time constraints of the researcher.

### Limitations

Limitations of this research study began with the researcher's beliefs about urban school environments. The researcher assumed that urban students, teachers, and leaders are unique. The researcher was raised in an urban environment, and frequently felt as though urban students were often marginalized and misrepresented by educational policy, specifically the demands of the NCLB Act. Another limitation of this study was that some publications cited may have been older than 10 years due to the limited research related to urban teacher retention practices. Although a wide body of research exists regarding teacher retention, at the time of this study, very little of the research specifically addressed the urban school setting. The last limitation of this study involved the purposeful and convenience sampling of the participants. All participants followed the same procedures and policies because they were employed in the same school

district; therefore, participants may have had some of the same conceptions, understandings, and discernments regarding urban school policies and procedures.

### Assumptions

The researcher assumed that schools selected to participate in the study had experienced some difficulty in retaining teachers and that teacher participants, at some point in their career, desired to leave the urban environment. This was an assumption due to the fact that the schools selected were categorized as “high needs” and no data existed on retention or turnover rates at selected schools. The researcher also assumed that principals had been fair in their treatment of teachers and staff related to the implementation of policy and procedures, and that all participants were open and honest with their answers and responses in both the survey and focus group.

### Definition of Terms

**Effective Teacher:** For the purpose of this research, an effective teacher is defined as one who is successful in growing students academically, socially, and/or emotionally, and success has been documented or measured by teacher evaluation and/or student performance data.

**High Needs School:** For the purpose of this research, high needs schools are defined as urban schools characterized by low levels of academic growth/achievement as identified by standardized testing data.

**Retention** is defined as the continuous employment of a teacher in a school district beyond the probationary period (Ingersoll, 2001c).

**Urban Leader/Teacher:** For the purpose of this study, the urban leader or teacher is defined as a principal or teacher employed at an urban school.

Urban School: For the purpose of this research, the researcher defined an urban school as one located in a metropolitan area and heavily concentrated with minority groups impacted by poverty.

### Summary

Although urban school districts have reputedly high levels of teacher attrition, research and wisdom of practice suggest a wide variety of solutions to the problem, including induction programs, teacher collaboration initiatives, increased sharing of instructional and curricular control with teachers, rewards and recognition programs, support for teachers seeking high-quality professional development, efficient management of resources, maintenance of attractive and well-organized school environments. However, if some of these suggested “career ladders” that recognize and reward excellence were implemented, teacher satisfaction would likely improve and teacher attrition would diminish (Olsen & Anderson 2009; Stotko, Ingram, & Beaty-O’Ferrall, 2007; Warshauer-Freedman, & Appleman, 2009; Brown & Wynn, 2007). Educational leaders should redirect focus from teacher recruitment to teacher retention. Payne (1996) suggested that urban students benefit greatly from building meaningful relationships with teachers. The job of the urban principal is to implement retention strategies that will support this research by keeping teachers in place so that urban students can have opportunities to build meaningful and trusting relationships with teachers in an effort to raise academic achievement. According to Williams (2003), teachers stay in a school for three main reasons: (a) being intellectually stimulated, (b) seeing students excel, and (c) professional relationships and autonomy. Urban leaders need to take full control over building professional relationships so that teachers will desire to remain helping those who need a lot of support and access to resources—the poor, urban child.

The institution of public education has always served as a staple in American history and can be considered the only remaining institution that has an obligation to serve all children regardless of race, gender, ability, national origin, religion, or economic status. Increasingly, our public schools are also an integral segment of the nation's safety net for the poor. Children growing up in poverty are disadvantaged for many reasons, and unfortunately these issues begin to surface once they enter school. School for children should not only be a place for learning, fun experiences, and discovery, but also a place where they find their voice and individualism. The urban school, located in an area of great density and diversity, finds itself at a convergence of an array of realities. Students in urban environments come from a multitude of cultures, ethnicities, races and socioeconomic statuses. Schools in these areas must be prepared to address and respond to the demands of the urban environment while diligently working to implement a multicultural, rigorous curriculum.

Due to the wide spectrum of issues faced by the urban school, teachers experience burnout at high rates. This burnout frequently leads to high levels of teacher attrition and turnover. This turnover contributes to the achievement gap that exists between the affluent and the urban poor. Educational leaders must be prepared not only to recruit teachers, but more importantly, aid in their retention in the urban environment. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher retention practices implemented by urban school leaders.

The researcher implemented both qualitative and quantitative methods, making this study mixed- methods in nature. As a result of convenience and homogenous case sampling, participants were identified for the study. Principal permission was requested along with consent of their teaching staff. Teachers were asked to complete a survey regarding attitudes and beliefs about their perspectives of principals' behaviors and how they correlated to teacher retention. In



addition, two focus groups of teachers were conducted to expand on the quantitative data collected. The results of this study will inform the urban leadership profession by providing insight on strategies for retaining urban teachers, thus helping to improve levels of achievement in poor, urban areas.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Urban schools face a reality unlike others. One out of four American children attends school in an urban district; one out of every six American children lives in poverty; and in urban schools where most of the students are poor, two-thirds or more of the children fail to reach even the “basic” level of achievement on national tests (McLoyd, 1998; Swain, 2006; Talbert-Johnson, 2004; Voltz 1998). Urban schools are where most states face the greatest gap between expectations for students and reality in terms of resources, achievement, and teacher quality (Olson, 2003; Swanson-Gehrke, 2005). This being the case, urban schools may need prescribed interventions or specified programs which specifically address its uniqueness. Urban leaders must be willing to approach leadership and academic achievement with a sound knowledge base of the characteristics and challenges of the urban environment, research and implement interventions, and remain committed and passionate about impacting the lives of urban students.

The review of literature served as a guide for the researcher. According to Galvan (2006), the literature review in a thesis or dissertation is usually meant to establish that the writer has a thorough command of the literature on the topic being studied, typically resulting in a relatively extensive literature review. Respectively, the purpose of this literature review was to acknowledge and review research in urban education related to poverty, teacher turnover/attrition, teacher retention, and leadership. This review of literature was gathered using Galileo, ERIC, EbscoHost, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Key search words were teacher retention/turnover, urban schools, and leadership. The literature was organized in four central themes: (a) the theoretical framework in which the research was grounded, (b) the urban school

context (c) challenges of the urban teacher, and (d) the urban leader and role in teacher retention. (see Figure 1). The organizational pattern designed for this literature review highlighted the relationship between themes and was constructed to exhibit their interrelatedness.



*Figure 1.* Literature Review Organization

Because the study was aimed at impacting urban leadership practice, the review of literature began with a description of the theoretical framework—Transformative Learning Theory. Although many urban students may struggle at the onset of their academic career due to a convergence of social issues, the school environment can have a major impact on student achievement; therefore, the review of literature described the characteristics of urban schools and the context in which students were expected to achieve.

The role of the teacher in urban schools, how it differs from teachers in nonurban areas, and why the teacher turnover rate is greater in urban schools were carefully examined. Further,

the literature review evaluated current research pertaining to urban leadership and the influence the leader has, if any, on student achievement and teacher retention, and concludes with a brief summary.

The majority of the literature reviewed was empirically based, peer reviewed, and obtained from an educational, psychological, or sociological journal; other research was obtained from books and dissertations related to the central themes. Studies assessed related to nonurban schools were incorporated to demonstrate the direct differences experienced by those in the urban versus the suburban environment. This research was fundamental in ascertaining the unique characteristics of urban schools. Although some foundational studies were included, most of the literature was limited to students or schools directly affected by poverty or urban status. The focus of this literature review was to identify the needs and concerns of urban teachers, the impact urban environments have on teacher retention, and subsequently, how an urban leader does or does not play a role in that process.

#### Theoretical Framework - Transformative Learning Theory

There is a sense of urgency in urban education. The academic gap continues to widen between poor and non-poor children. Many urban schools are comprised of minorities; however, simply being a minority does not put one at an educational disadvantage. Many factors play a role in this educational disadvantage and research has repeatedly demonstrated that poverty and social concerns correlated with the urban environment can be a major influence on the academic success of urban children. Urban schools have higher rates of turnover and often struggle with keeping teaching slots filled because of the many issues the urban student faces. Urban students deserve an equal opportunity education and that includes having teachers who are qualified and

are passionate about teaching them. Urban leaders are not only charged with recruiting those teachers, but additionally, they are charged with retaining them.

The Theoretical framework that undergirded this study was the Transformative Learning Theory by (1981). This learning framework was defined by Clark (1993) as learning that induces more far-reaching change in the learner than other kinds of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the learner and produce a significant impact, or paradigm shift, which affects the learner's subsequent experiences. Although there are various facets of this framework, Mezirow was the leading developer of the theory, and established the concepts of "meaning perspectives" and "meaning schemes." Meaning perspectives refer to one's overall view of the world. Meaning schemes are the smaller elements that work together to develop one's meaning perspective, such as precise knowledge, values, and beliefs about one's experiences. In other words, the meaning perspective is generated during one's childhood from various meaning schemes. Mezirow viewed the meaning perspective as the domain in which transformational learning takes place in adulthood as it develops through life experiences. For the purpose of this study and as it related to this theoretical framework, the learner referred to the teacher and the teacher referred to the instructional leader. As instructional leaders, principals are responsible for providing learning experiences for teachers through professional development opportunities and modeling expectations, ultimately challenging teachers to reflect and expound on their meaning perspectives and how they relate to teaching in the urban environment. The teacher's life experiences and meaning schemes serve as the starting point for transformational learning. According to Kunjufu (2001), 85% of teachers do not experience the same lifestyle as their students which creates a large gap between teachers and students in the classroom, both culturally and socioeconomically.

Mezirow (1991) identified three common themes which characterize the theory: (a) experience, (b) critical reflection, and (c) rational discourse. Experience refers to the aforementioned meaning perspectives and meaning schemes. The critical reflection piece was pertinent to this study because it was a critical and distinguishing characteristic of adult learning. Critical reflection is the means in which adults are able to question, validate, and adjust their cultural and world views and, thus, new meanings take place (Mezirow, 1991). Rational discourse simply refers to the learner's ability to survey the new learning with profundity and articulate this to colleagues and leaders. Mezirow (1997) later stressed the importance of transformative learning as being the root in which humans communicate and reflect, therefore, strengthening one's ability to expand their world view to be more inclusive and tolerant. Mezirow offered a detailed description of an optimal transformational learning environment as one that is free from coercion, has equal opportunity to assume various roles, is empathetic, gives full information to participants, and has good listeners who are disposed to search for common ground, or an amalgamation of different points of view. He further highlighted several means to encourage transformational learning including group projects/work, journal writing, role play, use of metaphors, and real life experiences to stimulate critical reflection and rational discourse.

The Transformative Learning Theory characterizes specific roles for both the instructor and the students. Taylor (1998) identified the role of the teacher as one that establishes an environment depicted with trust, care, and safety. The Transformative Learning leader should foster relationships which are accepting and inclusive. Boyd and Myers (1998) incited adult educators to implement seasoned guidance and compassionate criticism when implementing the Transformative Learning Theory. Seasoned guidance refers to leaders/teachers being able to reflect upon and convey their experiences and to assist the learner in their transformational

process. Compassionate criticism allows learners to question their own reality in hopes of promoting a transformation in their world view. Cranton (1994) described the teacher's role as one of a role model that is willing to exhibit his/her will to change and transform. Taylor (1998) deemed that too much emphasis was put on the teacher's role, and the student role was often overlooked or devalued. Daloz (1986) asserted that the learner should have a major role in developing the environment and process of transformational learning and argued that instructors should organize learning experiences to allot room for personal development rather than isolated competencies. Daloz (1999) further frequented a metaphor of transformational learning in which the mentor or instructor served as a gatekeeper or guide as the student progressed on a journey. .

As with any theory, there are challenges and opposition related to the Transformative Learning Theory. While the theory is known for developing one's ability to reflect inwardly and support the learner in self-actualization, critics such as Baumgartner (2001) questioned whether transformative instructors had the right to foster this type of learning. He cautioned that this theory may cross ethical lines and suggested a formal code of ethics be put in place prior to its implementation. Additionally, the researcher challenged the concept of the safe, trusting, and caring environment, in that students frequently view instructors as authoritative and this may alter the authenticity of transformational learning. Students may not feel comfortable in challenging beliefs, values, concepts, or interpretations set forth by the instructor due to their authoritative status.

Even though this learning theory is not directly related to the teaching and learning process between adults and children, it is very relevant and applicable to the current study because it explores ways teachers can learn more about themselves and the children they serve. As mentioned previously, for the purposes of this study, the teacher/mentor/instructor defined by

the theory relates to the urban leader. Current trends in education require the principal to serve not only as a manager of daily school operations but also as an instructional leader, one who continually works with teachers to either instruct or mentor them in becoming more instructionally sound. In other words, the principal frequently serves as an instructor of teachers. Therefore, teachers frequent a role of the student when it comes to learning new ideas, concepts, and trends in education, and how to best reach the 21st century learner. Further, the traditional school model is consistently evolving and changing as it relates to how students learn best, what concepts and skills should be mastered at various grade levels and specifically in the arena of instructional technology. Principals must lead and mentor their teachers in remaining current and relevant with the times, and this is done through the teaching and learning process.

Additionally, American schools, specifically in urban areas, are filled with a diverse population. The American student body is evolving as students come from various backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, and often speaking different languages. Unfortunately, the American teaching force has not been so quick to evolve as 90% of the teaching force is white and female (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). This is one of the primary reasons the Transformative Learning Theory is pertinent to the study because through this framework, teachers not only draw off of their experiences or schemas, they learn to challenge these experiences through critical reflection and rational discourse to modify their world view and level of tolerance and acceptance in hopes of becoming a better teacher. The context and environment of the urban school can pose many challenges for the teacher, those not necessarily experienced by rural or suburban teachers. These challenges may be the reason turnover rates in inner-city schools are higher.



## Urban School Context, Challenges, and Characteristics

### History

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many American families lived in either rural or urban settings. Cities were the hubs for manufacturing factories and it was during this time that millions of Americans began migrating to cities seeking better jobs, a higher quality of living, and a better education for their children. In the early 20th century, urban schools spent twice as much per pupil as did rural districts, and thus along with increased income, came improved educational benefits. As the 20th century progressed, many families reaped the benefits of urbanization, such as steady employment and an increased standard of living (Ward & O'Sullivan, 2006; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Beginning as early as the 1920s and progressing through the 1980s, these middle-class families moved out of the inner-city to the new suburbs and surrounding areas as home-ownership was encouraged by the Federal Housing Administration. As this suburban "flight" took place, businesses, jobs, and resources followed, leaving the once flourishing inner-city drained of wealth. Fewer investments were made in urban areas, consequently creating highly concentrated areas of poverty (Euchner & McGovern, 2003; Ward & O'Sullivan, 2006). The loss of the middle class, who were mostly white, resulted in inner cities becoming habituated by impoverished minorities. Many different subcultures had an impact on urban environments. Lee (2005) listed the following as characteristics which helped define the urban environment: population density; structural density; high concentration of people of color; a high concentration of recent immigrants; a high rates of reported crimes; per capita higher rates of poverty; complex transportation patterns; a high concentration of air born pollutants; strong cultural stimulation; diversity in property values; inequities in the educational system; large, complex education systems; inequities in the legal system; lack of community

connectedness; cultural heterogeneity; and inequities in access to health care. Public schools in urban environments attending to complex and significant challenges, eerily parallel those facing schools prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), and starkly different from those in rural and suburban areas.

Despite desegregation efforts of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the American school system never truly integrated and currently grapples with a multifaceted educational inequality in 21st century schools. It has been over 60 years since the Brown vs. Board decision; however, the reality is that segregation in American schools has grown and intensified throughout the last six decades (Orfield, 2001). Presently, school segregation is increasing among African-American, Latino, and white students (Gandara, 2010). Minority schools are frequently segregated by poverty, class, and at times language. Research continues to demonstrate that separate is still not equal (Orfield, 2009; Gandara, 2010). Researchers have traced this pattern of resegregation, highlighting the south and border states as having the most segregated schools in the nation, ironically where civil rights began to integrate schools in the early 1960s (Orfield & Yun, 1999). Tatum (2010) points to several causes of this phenomena citing suburban flight from urban public school districts, a series of Supreme Court decisions limiting the use of desegregation strategies, and segregated housing patterns as the bases for such highly segregated schools in America.

#### Context and Characteristics

Urban schools mirror social, economic, and local political issues facing inner-city environments which impact the academic achievement of students. Current research consistently includes a myriad of characteristics associated with urban schools negatively affecting school improvement and reform efforts. Urban schools have the highest occurrences of absenteeism,

tardiness, truancy, and transiency. Urban students run a high risk for academic failure, lack of parental involvement, violent or criminal behaviors, teen pregnancy, drug involvement, and high school drop-out status (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Boutte, 2012; Lee, 2005; Ward & O'Sullivan, 2006; Swanson-Gehrke, 2005). Urban teachers have to be prepared to juggle the ever increasing needs of the urban student which contributes to higher rates of teacher burnout and turnover. Due to high turnover, urban districts hire more underqualified and unlicensed professionals resulting in various economic differences in salaries and further compounding turnover rates (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2005; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Miller, 2010; Orfield & Frankenburg, 2008; Phillips & Chin, 2004; Roza, Hill, Scalfani, & Speakman, 2004; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Zeichner (2003) cited demographic changes and the increase in diversity of learners, including social class, leading to a mismatch between backgrounds of students and teachers in urban schools. These changes exacerbated the already present concern for student behavior problems and high occurrences of physical conflict between students. Urban schools are overcrowded and have high teacher to student ratios; overcrowding can have a dire effect on student learning, particularly in schools with high proportions of students living in poverty.

Overcrowding can negatively affect classroom activities, instructional techniques, student concentration, classroom order, and the scheduling of the school day. Urban schools tend to lack the resources needed to meet these challenges, and frequently are described and depicted as having outdated teaching materials, aging building and facilities, and a general lack of updated instructional technological advances. Inadequate supplies are often the result of inequitable distribution of financial resources and typically include such basics as desks, whiteboards, children's literature books, and up-to-date textbooks. If urban schools have a high need for these basic supplies and materials, they are less likely to have access to more advanced resources such

as computers, smart boards and interactive learning opportunities, laboratory supplies for science, advanced calculators for mathematics, or artifacts for social studies. All of these factors are complexly interconnected and continually have alarming and momentous effects on urban school performance and perception.

#### Academic Achievement Gap between Urban and Suburban Students

Achievement differences between urban and suburban students are considerable and well-documented (Olson, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Urban students score at least 20 percentage points lower than their nonurban counterparts in reading, math, and science (Dougherty, 2007; Ward & O'Sullivan, 2006). Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicated that that achievement of children in affluent suburban schools was significantly and consistently higher than that of children in urban schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Although more than one achievement gap exists in America (i.e., the gender achievement gap, the special education gap, and even an international gap), most research on the achievement gap highlights the differences between minority and white students and/or urban and suburban students. As Cross (2007) highlighted, there is one prominent educational achievement gap that is an internal threat to the imminent, competitive advantage of the United States of America, and it resides in urban school districts. This gap is one between the low educational achievement of poor children in urban schools, many of whom are children of color and linguistically diverse, and their suburban, white, middle class counterparts who are high achieving.

Much early research on the achievement gap points to race as a major underlying cause for the gap; however, more recent studies counter this argument citing various environmental factors as the basis for the achievement gap (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Some research suggested

that the academic gap is due to the effects of social segregation (Bankston & Caldas, 1998; Reardon, 2011) while others proposed that lack of access to high quality school resources (Biddle & Berliner, 2003) or low parental education, income, and home resources as causes for the gap (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Sirin, 2005; Entwisle & Astone, 1994; McLoyd, 1998). Bainbridge and Lasley (2002) wrote that although humans are born with very similar ranges of intelligence, the different nurturing processes that take place in the formative years have tremendous impact on a child's ability to learn. In other words, environmental factors are the primary predictors of a child's academic success or failure. The research unequivocally correlates low socioeconomic status with minorities and academic failure (Bergeson, 2006; Rowan, Cohen, & Raudenbush, 2004; Sum & Fogg, 1991). Research indicated that receiving government assistance such as food stamps, and section eight housing had a negative effect on academic achievement (Peter & Mullis, 1997). Students who are at risk because of family SES are more likely to end up in schools with limited financial resources (Sirin, 2005). Urban students are underrepresented in colleges and universities mainly because they are disproportionately from families impacted by poverty and/or low levels of parent education, contrary to the assertion that minorities innately possess lower levels of intelligence (Borg & Stranahan, 2002). Coleman et al. (1966) were some of the first to make a correlation between academic achievement and socioeconomic status. Coleman et. al also asserted that the longer urban minority students stayed in school, the larger the achievement gap will become.

Throughout the past decade, the achievement gap has remained evident, and appears to have had some negative effects on urban teaching strategies (Phillips & Flashman, 2007). This can be contributed to urban teachers being pressured to ensure students are meeting the basic requirements on standardized tests. Moreover, urban teachers are often forcing academic

standards and curriculum to the side by dedicating more class time teaching to the test (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002). This can have grave results for urban students because it means their overall knowledge and performance will continue to decrease over time (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002). According to Phillips and Crouse (1998), about two thirds of the test gap can be associated with a student's background or family structure, leaving school factors to possibly affect the unexplained and remaining one third. There is evidence that has identified some attributes of urban schools can perpetuate and contribute to the achievement gap (Cross 2007; Sirin 2005). Specifically, urban school characteristics and environment may be more significant in explaining variances in academic achievement between urban and suburban students (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Bankston & Caldas, 1997; Duncan & Sandy, 2010; Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007). In schools with 25% of the student body living in poverty, all students, whether poor, affluent, or in between, tend to do less well than students from schools in affluent communities (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002). When urban students have the opportunity to attend schools with classmates who come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, their academic achievement improves (Bankston & Caldas, 1997). Providing further support of this view, Hannaway (2005) asserted that urban schools with a concentration of poverty create an educational experience and environment that is not supportive of high achievement. Sandy and Duncan (2010) identified the school characteristic that is most influential on urban school improvement as class size. Further, Lacour and Tissington (2011) found that teacher quality and use of effective and appropriate instructional strategies and techniques are the most noteworthy tools in improving academics. This suggests that the urban teacher may be a key factor in improving academic achievement of students and quintessential to closing the achievement gap.

## Challenges of the Urban Teacher

Teachers and their instructional practices can be the most influential school-based factor for student success (Barton, 2004; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010). Gaining students' attention and cooperation in urban classrooms involves establishing an environment where teachers address students' cultural and ethnic needs, as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs (Brown, 2003). Teachers in urban schools face arduous challenges related to student characteristics, school personnel, structure, and curriculum (Voltz, 1998). Urban teachers educate the largest number of American students with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities (Adams, 2003). Further, urban teachers are more likely to suffer negative effects from poor performance on standardized testing (Kopowski, 2008).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2000), 84% of American teachers are white and female, and teachers of color make up less than 15% of the U.S. teaching force. The racial makeup of American teachers directly conflicts with the trends in student demographic data. Villegas and Lucas (2002) noted that in 1998, one third of the student population were minorities; however, by 2035 they are expected to become the numerical majority. Students of color often suffer educational deprivation due to negative stereotypes, prejudices, perceptions, lingering prejudicial practices, and thoughts of educational inferiorities (Beachum, 2010; Beachum & McCray, 2008, 2011; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Perry, 2003; Pitre, Jackson, & Charles, 2010; Theoharis, 2009). This is critical because teachers' attitudes can affect their expectations, treatment of students, and student achievement (Irvine, 1990; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1969; Rist, 1970). Teachers who share experiences with their students, value diversity, and recognize talents tend to be successful with minority students (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Delpit, 1995; Ginwright, 2004; Kailin, 2002). On the other hand, teachers who do

not implement these practices tend to perpetuate negative stereotypes, ignore cultural experiences, and have low expectations (Kunjufu, 2002; Tatum, 2007). This indicates change will need to be encompassed by educators to amend outdated, unsuccessful practices and policies, and develop a systematic approach to providing equalized education for all students.

In light of the NCLB Act (2002), schools were pressured to ensure “highly qualified teachers” were teaching in urban schools. This has been difficult, due to the lack of consistency regarding what defines a highly qualified teacher. It has been noted that varying school environments may not necessitate the same criteria for a “highly qualified teacher.” School districts around the country are struggling to set criteria for designating educators as highly qualified (Thompson, Ransdell, & Rousseau, 2005). There is little to no evidence that the federal government is ensuring that only teachers who are highly qualified are instructing impoverished, diverse students who are the intended beneficiaries of the NCLB (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). There is some disparity between the NCLB and the reality of underqualified and inexperienced teachers in urban classrooms. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003), 14% of all teachers in New York City’s schools were uncertified, and 31% of all recently hired teachers performed poorly on teacher certification examinations for minimum competency. In California, more than 37,000 teachers lacked full certification in 2000 and 2001. NCLB does require teachers to be certified in core subject areas taught; however, this is simply not enough to be successful in an urban environment.

Successful urban teachers take responsibility for promoting equitable practices for all students, despite their ethnicity, race, primary language, socioeconomic status, and or/functioning level (Irvine, 2003). According to Haberman (2005), star urban teachers were nonjudgmental and pragmatic; reacted to charged situations with calmness; were attentive to



others with less power and did not see power as a goal; acknowledged and compensated for weak areas; did not hold missionary perspectives; were for networking for support; were lifelong learners; enjoyed working with children; and put high priority in the educational success of those in poverty. Comparably, Ladson-Billings and Darling-Hammond (2000) classified dimensions mandatory to successfully teach urban youth. These possible predefined categories were (a) foci on relationships and shared authority, (b) linking classroom content with student experiences, (c) incorporations of familiar and culturally compatible communication patterns, and (d) development of counter narratives that challenge typical conceptions of at-risk students and families.

There have been a host of concerns reported by urban teachers including inadequate resources, professional isolation, classroom management issues, lack of professional support, and feeling unprepared for teaching in urban schools (Andrews & Quinn, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Sprague & Pennell, 2000). Urban teachers request more professional development to serve urban students, and urban parents look for better ways to connect with urban schools (Compton-Lilly, 2000; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Wang et al., 2004). General responses from teacher education programs regarding these requests has generally been to add a few courses on multiculturalism, English as a Second Language (ESL), or urban education (Zeichner, 2003).

Work has begun by teacher education programs pertaining to the preparation of effective urban teachers (Haberman, 2005, Ladson-Billings & Darling-Hammond, 2000; McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnsons, & Robinson, 2008; Polk, 2006). Nevertheless, both traditional and nontraditional teacher education programs struggle to develop teachers who are well-equipped with skills, attitudes, dispositions, practices, and worldviews (Gay, 2010) to foster instructional practices and strategies effective with urban students. Milner (2012) identified

several challenges in urban teacher preparation as follows: (a) difficulty framing consistency in current urban teacher programs, (b) inconsistencies in common vocabulary in urban teacher education, (c) difficulty building theory about teacher education for urban education due to scattered literature, and (d) unclear and inconsistency with student teaching and practicum experiences in urban teacher education programs. Teacher candidates need an understanding of urban cultures, as well as an understanding that a commitment to teach in urban settings goes beyond knowledge of curriculum and cognitive development; it includes the ability to “critically examine and interrogate their ideological orientations as part of their learning processes” (Bartomole & Trueba, 2000, p. 282). Teacher education programs should place a focus on teacher dispositions and ability to address diversity issues. Quinn (2005) noted that it is essential that higher education programs design a common, cohesive framework that defines the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that urban teachers and leaders are expected to possess and apply. Teacher education programs should direct their efforts on obtaining candidates that exhibit ethical dispositions that are required in urban contexts. Further, more emphasis must be placed on genuine preparations of teachers who are fully prepared to consider school, family, and community contexts to curriculum and classroom experiences (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Several teacher education programs have implemented practicum experiences for new teachers in urban environments to provide exposure to the uniqueness of inner-city schools and gain new perspectives on urban communities. Villegas and Lucas (2002) described four types of field experiences that can help prospective urban teachers understand their students and the community in which they teach: (a) guided school and community visits, (b) service learning opportunities in both urban schools and community organizations, (c) studies of students, classrooms, schools, and communities, and (d) practica in diverse contexts with teachers who are

engaged in equity pedagogy. Similarly, Banks (2001) suggested that teacher preparation programs should offer experiences that help students of teaching (a) uncover and identify personal attitudes towards racial, ethnic language, and cultural groups; (b) acquire knowledge about the histories and cultures of the diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups within the nations and within their schools; (c) become acquainted with the diverse perspectives that exist within different ethnic and cultural communities; and (d) understand the ways in which institutionalized knowledge within schools, universities, and popular culture can perpetuate stereotypes about racial and ethnic groups. This research offers well-defined direction for programs pursuing this pertinent work. However, Rushton (2001) stated that providing field placement of preservice teachers in urban environments can also cause culture shock, cognitive dissonance, and a lack of efficacy among future teachers. It is still unclear if these experiences lead to well-prepared urban teachers. Studies on the effects of field experiences in urban and diverse schools can be contradicting and oftentimes are very complex (Foote & Cook-Cottone, 2004; Cook & Van Cleaf, 2000; Fry & McKinney, 1997; Weiner, 2000). Additionally, high-need urban schools often face many challenges making it hard for them to cultivate the professional growth of teacher candidates. It appears that the lack of experienced mentors, appropriate teaching assignments, solid teacher attendance and continuity, as well as search of academic partnerships has created a climate that has systemically discouraged research on effective high-need urban field experiences (Foote & Cooke-Cottone, 2004).

#### Urban Teacher Burnout, Turnover, and Mobility

Teacher burnout has increasingly become a professional concern for educators due to its damaging effects on both the physical and emotional functional ability of teachers. Collins and Masley (1980) found that 90% of Massachusetts Public teachers experienced job related stress.

Teachers who are highly stressed are more likely to experience ulcers, headaches, intestinal and cardiovascular problems (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977). The research is not clear regarding the extent in which burnout yields impaired teaching or the consequences experienced by students; nonetheless, teacher burnout has reached serious proportions (Gold, 1985) and is more likely to be experienced by urban teachers (Owens, Mundy, & Harrison, 1980).

The history of burnout research developed from the stress research done by Richter (1943) and Selye (1978); however, the evolution of burnout occurred in the 1970s through the work of Freudenberger (1977) and Maslach and Pines (1979). Over time, burnout has been described and defined in many ways. According to Cherniss (1980), burnout is specifically relevant to those who spend considerable energy helping others gain insight or overcome problems. Although the original concept of burnout was related to human services, burnout has become a term frequently associated with teachers. Pines and Aronson (1988) stated that burnout is “characterized by physical depletion, by feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, by emotional drain, and by development of negative self-concept and negative attitudes toward work, life, and other people” (p. 15). Maslach (1976) proposed that professionals “lose all concern, all emotional feelings for the persons they work with and come to treat them in detached or even dehumanized ways” (p. 16). Freudenberger and Richeslon (1980) identified burnout as a “state of fatigue or frustration, brought about by the devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward” (p. 13). Burnout and stress are often used interchangeably or synonymously; however, there has been a recent push to differentiate the two by describing burnout as a result of stress and by developing a common definition of burnout (Gold, 1985).

Causes of teacher burnout have been researched and many have identified factors which lead to the development of burnout in teachers. Whiteman, Young, and Fisher (1985) noted that although the primary aim of teachers is academic development, burnout is often caused by the secondary nature of the profession—character education; teaching children to work together, share space, and practice tolerance for one another's differences. Block (1977) identified daily pressures of the classroom and physical assaults as causes of burnout. Walsh (1979) cited student assaults, administrative harassment, and paperwork pressure as causes of burnout. Further, Bardo (1979) suggested feelings of lost control in the classroom caused burnout. Teachers who are passionate, idealistic, and dedicated are more prone to burnout (Block, 1977). Moreover, Maslach (1976) found that professionals who are consistently involved with people who have problems can lead to a loss of care and commitment, and this loss can lead to feelings of burnout. Other potential causes of burnout have been named as increased accountability measures (Sorenson, 2007); poor working conditions (Cox, Palmer, Tourkin, Warner, & Lyter, 2007); lack of parental support or weak administration (Blasé, Blasé, & Du, 2008; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivin, 2001; Ingersoll, 2004; Lambert, O'Donnell, Kusherman, & McCarthy, 2006); violence, lack of feeling safe, and poor community involvement (Smith & Smith, 2006). Geving (2007) suggested student behavior as an increasing factor of burnout, and found 10 specific behaviors statistically significant in teacher burnout: hostility towards the teacher; not paying attention during class; noisiness; lack of effort in class; coming to class unprepared; hyperactivity; breaking school rules; harming school property; hostility toward other students; and lack of interest in learning. Kokkinos (2007) also found that student misbehavior and time constraints on teachers were predictors of teacher burnout. Zahn (1980) suggested that burnout for teachers typically emerges in a teacher's third year. The effects of burnout on a teacher can

often be described as impaired or ineffective teaching, high levels of job dissatisfactions, and most importantly, turnover. Nearly 50% of teachers leave the career before they reach their sixth year (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004) and presently teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Hanushek, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Teacher turnover and attrition has had increased attention in education research and policy. Although having similar effects, turnover and attrition are two different entities. Ingersoll (2001a, 2004) referred to turnover as the rate in which teachers migrate from school to school (“movers”), or leave the profession altogether (“leavers”). Twenty percent of new teachers desert the profession within the first three years and as many as 42% of them exit within the first 5 years of employment (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Ingersoll, 2004). Despite the confounding quantities of teachers leaving the profession, teachers who move from school to school nearly equal the overall teacher turnover rate (Olsen & Anderson, 2007). Ingersoll (2004) noted that in addition to the 290,000 teachers who left the profession in 1999, 250,000 moved from one school to another, amounting to more than half a million jobs in flux, bearing a huge financial responsibility on school districts (Olsen & Anderson, 2007).

Though teacher turnover is a major concern for American schools, it is no surprise that this challenge is greater in urban areas. Schools located in inner-city areas face tremendous turnover rates and suffer the most critical staffing difficulties (Carroll, Reichardt, Guarino, & Mejia, 2000; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001, 2004; Ingersoll, 2004; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). According to Ingersoll (2004), teachers in high-poverty schools are as much as 50% more likely to migrate to schools in affluent areas. A significant issue directly related to urban teacher turnover is the disproportionate effect it has on urban students. The National Center for Education Statistics (2000), documented that schools with 50% or more minority

students experience turnover at twice the rate of schools with lower minority populations. Additionally, teachers who switched schools were more likely to have served a greater proportion of minority, low-income, and low-achieving students at their previous schools (Freeman, Scafidi, & Sjoquist, 2002). Studies show that when offered the opportunity to leave urban schools to teach in more affluent areas, teachers will leave (Betts, Rueben, & Dandenberg, 2000; Bohrnstedt & Stecher, 1999; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001, 2004). Further, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2002) found that teachers migrating to affluent areas are more likely to possess higher skill sets than those who choose to stay in urban schools.

Given the documented research on teacher turnover in urban areas, this consequently can affect different aspects of urban school districts. One indicator of teacher turnover rates is school health and should be considered by districts when planning for school improvement. High turnover rates often have negative effects on a district's organizational capacity, subsequently having an effect on individual schools (Guin, 2004). Guin identified the following negative impacts of chronic teacher turnover: (a) disruptions in teaching occur when veteran urban teachers are consistently disrupted due to the constant stream of new teachers that prevent them from establishing any kind of order within their daily activities; (b) teacher turnover has a grave effect on professional development efforts; teachers are consistently repeating professional developments due to the large number of staff members new to the building or profession, and oftentimes viewed as a waste of time by veteran teachers; (c) instructional impacts include having a negative impact on the momentum of instruction, due to low morale and consistent "stop and go" instruction; (d) instructional planning and implementation frequently gets disrupted due to high turnover, because the school is not able to plan around individual teacher's strengths, making it difficult for remaining teachers to maintain a positive attitude toward

developing the school's instructional plan; and (e) a lack of collaboration of teachers due to mistrust and lack of energy required to build relationships with new colleagues. It is pertinent that urban school leaders acknowledge that high rates of teacher turnover will significantly cost district employees, students, and ultimately society as a whole. School leaders need to recognize that policies aimed at school improvement efforts will most likely fail if the reality of teacher turnover is ignored. According to Johnson and Birkeland (2003), teachers are more likely to report satisfaction when their schools are organized to support them in their efforts to be successful with students, and they are more likely to remain in urban settings if they have a relatively supportive administration.

#### The Urban Leader and Teacher Retention

Urban principals are not exempt from the consequential effects of the urban school environment. They, too, experience unique challenges related to leadership. Urban leaders face obstacles such as poverty, prejudices, disadvantage, and legislation unlike their suburban and rural counterparts (Kimball & Sirotnik, 2000; Wegenke, 2000). According to a study by Shen, Rodriguez-Campos, and Rinocones-Gomez (2005), urban principals in America have become more diversified as many minority and female principals have been recruited. They also noted that urban principals have strong backgrounds in instructional leadership and spent more time in the classroom or in curriculum/instructional-based positions prior to assuming the role of principal. Finally, the study depicts urban principals as highly educated group. The majority of urban principals have a master's degree and more than 10% have doctoral or other professional degrees (Shen, Rodriguez- Campos, & Ricones-Gomez, 2005). Despite the strong characteristics of the urban principals, many of them are forced to lead under the pressures of the urban school environment while dealing with the ever-changing role of the principal.



The role of urban principal is consistently evolving, and responsibilities and demands can oftentimes become overwhelming and extremely daunting (Kimball & Sirotnik, 2000; Portin, 2000; Su, Adams, & Minniberg, 2000). These factors, more than likely, are the underlying causes for the shortage of urban principals and what is keeping qualified applicants from applying (Cooley & Shen, 2000). Principals have always been vital in school effectiveness (Brookover, 1975; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1979), as well as school improvement (Cotton, 2003; Elmore, 2000; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004), and serving as change agents (Fullan, 1991; 2008; Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2000). Moreover, principals have a direct effect on school and student performance and influence the school's core organizational processes, climate, and resource attainment and allocation (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Knoepfel & Rinehart, 2008).

Urban School Leadership has become essential in the 21st century due to an increasingly complex environment characterized by accountability, diverse student populations, and consistent technological advances (Leithwood & Reihl, 2003). Specifically, accountability measures have had a major impact on the work of urban principals (Ylimika, Jacobsen, & Drysdale, 2007). While urban leadership is clearly important to current educational policy, little research has been done on the effects of accountability measures on urban schools, the very schools educational policy aims at supporting (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). Common knowledge seems to portray the urban school as unique; however, urban principals still report the demands of their positions stretch their time and attention in multiple directions, and new responsibilities are frequently added, making the management of it all appear impossible (Portin, 2000). When compared with the suburban principal, urban principals deal with less funding and higher costs, making them rely more on outside funding sources and political leadership skills, rather than

leadership skills which require them to make cases and compete for funds and resources (Portin, 2000).

Four characteristics embody what current research supports: (a) willingness to give of personal time; (b) understanding the importance of strong relationships with parents and community; (c) the ability to motivate students and teachers, and doing this with a (d) strong sense of urgency. These characteristics have been identified as commonalities between urban principals experiencing some success, and will be used as predefined categories for themes and patterns in data analysis for this study. Less noted in the research is the fact that urban principals are consistently working with teachers experiencing some form of “culture shock” due to the context of urban environments, and more specifically, building a bridge from teacher recruitment to teacher retention. Ensuring that urban students have highly qualified teachers simply is not enough. Urban students deserve teachers who are not only qualified but committed to the urban environment. Urban leaders must be steadfast in implementing effective practices related to retaining teachers.

The research is clear about strategies that principals implement which have a positive correlation to teacher retention. Specifically, four principles have been consistent in the research related to teacher retention: (a) adapting leadership to teacher’s needs (Brown & Wynn, 2007; & Angell, 2006); (b) providing support such as resources, clear communication, and organized school procedures; (c) fostering collegiality and collaboration (Hirsch, 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004); and (d) nurturing a positive school climate and culture (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Briggs, Morrison, & Coleman, 2012). Angelle (2006) noted that teachers socialized into an ineffective environment either acclimate and adapt ineffective practices or experience some form of conflict, resulting in turnover. Principals are central in developing a positive environment and have direct

influence over it (Briggs, Morrison, & Coleman, 2012). There is a variety of existing research related to the role a principal plays in teacher retention, specifically from the perspective of the teacher. Additionally, the research is extensive in its distinction between urban school environment and the suburban one. The research is lacking in regards to what specific behaviors and characteristics urban leaders exude that affect teachers' decision to remain in the urban environment, particularly from the perspective of the principal. The current study aims at amassing empirical data from urban teachers and how they view their principal's role in retaining teachers.

### Summary

This chapter reviewed the findings of articles, books, and research studies related to the Transformative Learning Theory which served as the conceptual framework for this study. This was followed by a review of research describing the urban school context's effect on teachers and leaders, urban turnover rates, and ultimately the relationship between leadership behaviors and teacher retention. This review supported the need for understanding what urban principals should do to retain teachers in the high-demanding urban school context. Identifying leadership behaviors which aid in the retention of urban teachers was the goal of this study. The results of the current study may support in establishing practices, cultivating programs, or developing professional learning communities which will sufficiently attend to the need to retain teachers in urban settings. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology used to address the research questions established in Chapter 1.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Although there was a small body of research regarding urban principals and their role or praxis in retaining urban teachers, the review of literature demonstrated its small scope and the need for further research. For many teachers employed in schools in metro Atlanta, meeting the demands of NCLB and Race to the Top is complicated by social realities characterized by the urban environment. Teachers' beliefs about learning, operationalized at either the individual or the collective level, are influenced by the context of the schools in which they teach, and when teaching in the urban context, it is critical that teachers believe students can learn despite their circumstances (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade 2009). The purpose of schools is to ensure academic achievement for children despite age, creed, color, race, or religion; however, students in urban or inner-city environments are not performing as well as their suburban counterparts. High levels of teacher attrition and turnover in urban areas are contributing to lower levels of achievement in students residing in urban areas impacted by poverty. A teacher retention report published by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement in Georgia (2010) revealed that although teachers in this southeastern state have a higher retention rate than the national average, the selected metropolitan school district participating in this study had significantly lower retention rates than their rural counterparts. Teachers in this urban area were reported as having a retention rate of 58.7% over a period of 10 years, while teachers in rural areas were being retained at a rate of 72.7%. This indicates that teachers in the participating district are experiencing something unique, causing them to leave the profession or transfer into other positions more frequently. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) suggest reasons behind teacher shortages

and turnover largely reside in working conditions fostered within schools and districts. Furthermore, district level and building level administrators have an effect on the decision of urban teachers to leave or stay in their positions based on working conditions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine teacher retention practices implemented by urban school leaders.

This chapter includes a restatement of the research questions, the research design, the study's population, participants, sampling information, and instrumentation. A briefing of the validation of instrumentation was included, along with the methods for data collection: response rates, analysis, and how the data were reported are also included. This chapter concludes with a brief summary.

### Research Questions

Existing literature and research extensively covers characteristics of the urban school environment, leader, and turnover rates. Moreover, the research demonstrates a correlation between the effects of the urban context, urban leader, and urban teacher turnover rates and academic achievement. Much research has been conducted on recruiting and hiring teachers, but there is limited research on retention practices, specifically practices implemented in the urban area. The intention of this research study was to examine teacher retention practices implemented by urban principals. The quantitative research questions were designed to identify whether new and veteran teachers have the same experiences related to the challenges they face, learning experiences/ professional development opportunities, and demographics/diversity of the urban schools they are employed.

Rq1: What is the difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience?

- Ho1: There is no statistical significant difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience.
- Ho1a: There is a statistical significant difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience.
- Rq2: What is the difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience?
- Ho2: There is no statistical significant difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience.
- Ho2a: There is a statistical significant difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience.
- Rq3: What is the difference between demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience?
- Ho3: There is no statistical significant difference between demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience.
- Ho3a: There is a statistical significant difference between school demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience

Due to the concentration of social issues in urban areas, schools are challenged with meeting the demands of school reform efforts, while addressing the many social issues urban students bring to the classroom. This causes teachers to burn out more quickly, resulting in higher levels of attrition and turnover. Likewise, urban principals need to be prepared to counteract high turnover with proven teacher retention strategies. Therefore, the overarching qualitative research question developed to provide focus for this study was:

- RQ1. What personal and professional behaviors do urban principals exhibit which may contribute to high levels of teacher retention and stability?

The following supporting qualitative research questions also guided the research:

- RQ2. What is the association between the challenges faced by urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?
- RQ3. What is the association between the professional development opportunities provided to urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?
- RQ4. What is the association between urban school demographics/diversity and teacher retention rates?
- RQ5. What are teachers' perception of principal's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding teacher retention?

The qualitative research questions for this study were aligned with the categories identified in the teacher survey (see Appendix A). These categories related directly to various pathways an urban leader takes in leading and managing the school (Sarpy-Simpson, 2005). Specifically, the teacher survey addresses areas that were identified in the review of literature as challenges and difficulties experienced by the urban educator.

### Research Design

An empirical, mixed-method design was used for this study. A mixed-method design uses both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2005). This study began with the collection of quantitative data, followed by the collection of qualitative data to further expound on the quantitative results. According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007), by mixing the datasets, the researcher provides a better understanding of the problem than if either dataset had been used alone. Mixed methods research began to develop in the early 1950s with the work of

Campbell and Fisk (1959) who recognized the significance of collecting multiple forms of quantitative data for validation purposes. This premise continued to develop with the work of Sieber (1979) and Jick (1979) who combined both qualitative and quantitative data in their research. As the debate continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s as to whether mixed methodology was truly a valid way to conduct research, researchers in the 21st century began to advocate that it be recognized as a separate and valid design (Tashakorri & Teddlie; Creswell, 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) identified strengths in implementing mixed methods design as (a) providing strengths that offset the weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative data; (b) producing more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem that either qualitative and quantitative alone; (c) helping to answer questions that qualitative or quantitative cannot answer alone, and (d) encouraging researchers to collaborate across the sometimes adversarial relationship between quantitative and qualitative advocates.

Mixed methods research is becoming more widely accepted by experts in both qualitative and quantitative disciplines, and this study implemented the explanatory design. The explanatory design is a two-phase method where the qualitative data help explain or build upon initial quantitative results (Creswell & Plano, 2007). In other words, quantitative data were collected first, and the qualitative phase of the research was designed so that it directly connected to the quantitative phase. The researcher identified specific quantitative results that required additional explanation. The researcher then collected qualitative data from participants who clarified these results. When implementing this design, emphasis was placed on the qualitative phase of the study; challenges included amounts of time required for data collection and the decision by the researcher to use the same participants in both phases. Although the same participants in this



study were used in both phases of data collection, data were still valuable due to the varied level of teacher experience and perspectives.

### Population

The participants for this study were drawn from 7 out of 53 elementary schools in a large urban school district in a southeastern state. This district is considered an urban school system based on its Title I status, percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch, and/or percentage of students of color. The district is established in a city with a population over 540,000 people and serves approximately 49,000 students. According to the data formulated by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2014), this district had the following percentages of ethnic groups represented at the close of the 2012-2013 school year: Asian 1%, Native American 0%, African American 77%, Hispanic 7%, Multiracial 1%, and White 14%. Over 75% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch and 93% of the schools received Title I funds.

According to data published by the Georgia Department of Education (2014), the district employed approximately 3,700 teachers: 23% of the teachers were male, while 77% were female; 75% of the teachers employed by the district were African-American, 21% were White, 3% were Hispanic, and 4% were Native Americans/Asians/other; 36% of the teachers had a bachelor's degree, 44% had obtained a master's degree, 4% had a doctoral degree, and 16% had a degree in another field. The average of teaching experience was 10.92 years. Additionally, the district employed 486 administrators: 27% of the administrative staff was male, while 73% of them were female; 88% of the administrators were African American, 11% were White, and the last 1% was comprised of Hispanic and Asian administrators. The average experience of the administrators was 15.93 years. One noticeable difference in the district's teacher and

administrator demographics was that the majority of the instructional and administrative staff were people of color. This trend was not consistent with national demographic data reported by the National Center of Education Statistics (2011) which was 90% of teaching and administrator staff being white. This population was best suited for this study because it is a large, urban area, which provides large numbers of teachers with varied levels of experience and education. As the demographics demonstrated, teachers employed in this district had an average of 11 years of experience, which provided the researcher with rich data from teachers relating to personal and professional experiences and encounters, inclusive of a level of understanding and familiarity with the urban school environment.

### Participants

There were 53 elementary schools in the district; from this population, the seven schools identified and selected were considered “high needs” schools based on the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch and low academic achievement data. For the purpose of this study, high needs schools were those characterized by low socioeconomic status, a high percentage of students of color, and low levels of academic growth/achievement as identified by standardized testing data. The demographics of schools selected were very similar. Students of color of selected schools ranged from 98% to 100%; the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch ranged from 77% to 100%; and 100% of the schools had active Title I status. The teacher participants were solicited based on their willingness and consent to further educational research in the area of urban teacher retention practices. Further, the participants had the opportunity to have a voice in inspiring new, novice, and aspiring teachers in working with urban students.

## Sample

The sample for this study was the staff of elementary schools (approximately 210 teachers). Teachers in grades K-5 were requested to complete the survey in an effort to provide a range of experience with urban students ages 5-11. The expectation was that an average of 20 surveys would be completed at each school site. In an effort to collect reliable data, the expected response rate was 50-60%, or 157 surveys returned. The purposeful sampling technique was utilized for the study; however, the homogenous sampling technique was implemented as well. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) defined purposeful sampling as the process of selecting cases that are likely to be “information-rich” with respect to the purposes of a qualitative research study. Similarly, Gall et al. explained that homogeneous sampling includes a group of cases that are similar because they represent one defined point of variation in the phenomenon being studied. Creswell and Clark (2007) defined purposeful sampling as a technique in which the researchers intentionally select participants who have experience with the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored. A purposeful sampling technique was best matched for the study because the purpose of the study was to attain the perspective of urban school teachers related to how a principal influences their decision to remain in the urban environment.

## Instrumentation

The researcher gathered data using the Novice and Veteran Teacher Survey (Sarpy-Simpson, 2005) and a focus-group protocol to pose semistructured questions. The demographic and professional information collected for this study was: gender, age, number of years teaching, and highest degree earned. The demographic information collected from this survey helped the researcher determine if experience, age, or level of education influenced one’s decision to remain teaching an urban environment.

### Quantitative Instrument

The teacher participants completed a Novice and Veteran Teacher Survey (see Appendix A) obtained from Claudine Sarpy-Simpson (2005) in her research regarding teacher retention in urban environments. The teacher survey utilized a Likert Scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, and was aimed at determining teachers' perceptions about principal leadership practices in the urban environment. The survey was designed to identify principal behaviors which inspire teacher job satisfaction that leads to the desire to remain in the profession. The areas of interest categorized in the survey were: (a) challenges faced by urban educators, (b) professional development opportunities, and (c) diversity/student demographics. The survey facilitated the determination of urban teachers' intrinsic or extrinsic motivation to continue teaching in urban environments, specifically if the building level administrator played a key role, if any, in their decision to continue teaching urban students. Permission to use this survey was granted via email (see Appendix B).

### Qualitative Instrument - Focus Group Interview

Focus groups were defined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) as a type of interview involving an interviewer and a group of research participants who are free to talk with and influence each other in the process of sharing their ideas and perceptions about a defined topic. The interview questions designed were semistructured and conversational. The purpose of this focus group was to expound upon the experiences of the urban elementary school teacher as they related to their perceptions of principals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding teacher retention. Additionally, the conversation was structured by questions developed by the researcher which was based on the review of literature and mirrored the categories embedded in the survey questions.

From the teacher survey demographic data and consent form, the researcher solicited 12 teachers to participate in two focus groups. The focus groups were divided into two groups of six teachers. The focus group participants were selected based on their consent to participate during the quantitative phase of data collection. Only those participants who expressed an interest in participating in the focus group were contacted. Participants were selected from all of seven schools in the sample.

### Validation

The instrument utilized was piloted and validity tested by the creator Claudine Sarpy-Simpson (2005). In her research on urban schools and retention practices, she developed a questionnaire and the process for developing the instrument was done in three parts: (a) content validation process, (b) pilot and field testing of the questionnaire, and (c) design of the instrument. The content validation process was done through the review of literature completed by Sarpy-Simpson (2005) in which she reviewed themes as teacher retention, and the role the principal as it related to perceptions and challenges of urban teachers. Further, a pilot study was done with 52 urban teachers; there was a return rate of 44.2%. After the initial testing of the questionnaire, teachers offered their suggestions to help improve the questionnaire, and the final design of the instrument was completed. These improvements included the overall readability of the instrument along with the professional appearance of the questionnaire (Sarpy-Simpson, 2005).

### Reliability

The reliability of the instrument was tested by Sarpy-Simpson (2005) using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were exercised and were tested at a confidence level of 95%. Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate

the internal consistency of the piloted perceptions scale. Reliability was established for the survey; Cronbach's alpha was approximately 84%; it was concluded that the survey had medium-high reliability for teachers.

#### Response Rate

The researcher determined that an acceptable response rate for the quantitative section of the study would be 50-60% of solicited participants for the teacher questionnaire (Kotlick & Higgins, 2001; Morton, Bandara, Robinson, & Car, 2012; Nulty, 2008). Approximately 210 teacher participants were contacted to complete the survey, and 50-60% of the range of responses was 105-126. Response rates from participants tended to be higher when given surveys face-to-face as opposed to online, which was how this number was determined (Nulty, 2008). The range of responses (105-126) provided an acceptable level of confidence to guide the researcher in making generalizations based on the information provided (Baruch, 1999; Baruch & Holton, 2008; Nulty, 2008).

#### Data Collection and Procedures

The researcher sought IRB approval through the university, and once obtained, the researcher applied to conduct the study through the school district's Department of Research and Evaluation. The approximate approval time from this department was 5 weeks and then principals were contacted and asked permission to conduct the study with their staff. Initially, contact was made via e-mail; follow-up correspondence was implemented after a two-week response time passed. Follow-up correspondence was made via telephone calls or face-to-face invitations. After consent was obtained from principals, the researcher petitioned for teacher consent at school-wide staff meetings by introducing the study and discussing the importance of such research in urban schools. Subsequently, teacher surveys were distributed at a designated

staff meeting/grade level meeting. Participants were asked to sign a consent form indicating their interest (or not) in participating in the second phase of research, the focus group. If participants were willing to participate, they were asked to leave contact information with the researcher. After the consent form was signed, the researcher conducted the face-to-face survey in a group setting and allowed the participants 15 to 20 minutes to complete the survey. Surveys were collected by the researcher, placed in an envelope, and sealed. Data collected from these surveys were analyzed, and participants expressing interest in participating in the focus group were contacted for further data collection.

Focus group participants were contacted via e-mail or telephone within 2 weeks of completing the survey by the researcher. The focus group was designed to explore, probe, and ask questions. The researcher served as the facilitator of the group, took notes and made observations during the focus group. The time frame for the focus group was 90 minutes but was extended if needed. The focus group location was in an area which was both convenient and comfortable for the participants and had a degree of privacy. Participants were invited to attend through an invitation letter (see Appendix C) inclusive of a request to participate form. Follow-up correspondence was given by the researcher to confirm their participation. A discussion guide was prepared by the facilitator which included the overall research questions. The purpose of this guide was to ensure that research topics and objectives were fully covered during the focus group. The researcher gained written consent from participants during the initial phase of the focus group, and again demographic information was obtained from the participants. This information was obtained because demographic information collection during the quantitative phase of the data collection process no longer represented the focus group participants collectively. The researcher ensured that the participants understood their rights, and

that their identities were not to be revealed in any reports. A rapport was established by the researcher to make sure that participants knew what to expect and the purpose of the focus group, as well as the format of the discussion was discussed at the beginning of the session. Participants were told that the discussion would be informal and active participation was preferred. The researcher explained that divergent views were welcome. The focus group discussion was recorded using an electronic recording device obtained from a local office supply provider. The researcher served as the facilitator of the focus group by asking questions and keeping the topics of discussion streamlined and focused. All recorded audio was used solely to assist the researcher in the data analysis and reporting process, was stored in a lock box, and was accessed solely by the researcher.

### Data Analysis and Reporting

#### Quantitative Data Analysis

The survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential analysis to describe and determine teacher attitudes about their principal's role (if any) in their decision to remain teaching in the urban environment. The survey data were loaded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0, for analysis. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the comparative analysis between the independent variables (challenges faced, professional development, and demographics/diversity) and dependent variable (years of experience).

#### Qualitative Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) explained that data analysis for qualitative research is the process of making sense out of the data, which involved consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have stated. Data obtained during the focus group were transcribed by the researcher.



Focus group data were interpreted based on the notes and narratives generated during the protocol analysis and predetermined coding system. Prior to the focus groups, the researcher devised a category system to code data based on the research questions. Transcripts from the focus groups were reviewed in search of patterns, relationships, and themes. This open coding system was implemented in 2 phases in an effort to highlight patterns and themes as they related to the predetermined categories/themes, which were aligned directly to the research questions designed for the study. Merriam (2009) referred to this process as “open coding” because the researcher was open to anything possible at this point. Focus group data were interpreted based on the narratives generated during the initial review and predetermined coding system. This data were used to further expound on quantitative data collected.

The analysis of data for this study was a complicated practice including scrutinizing basic and abstract ideas and implementing inductive and deductive reasoning. The researcher began coding by reading the first transcript and recording notes and observations. The same procedure was utilized on the second transcripts (stage 1 analysis). After this process was completed for both transcripts, the researcher combined lists of notes and observations and created a larger list of patterns grouped together to form codes and themes resulting in the data analysis (stage 2 analysis). This process is defined as axial coding (Merriam, 2009). The final deductions and themes identified answered the research questions.

Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data were detailed in chart/table format and written in narrative format. The research questions were addressed by each item on the instrument, and the qualitative data was reported by major findings revealed by the data. The researcher prepared a synthesized narrative depicting any conflictions or relationships between qualitative and quantitative data collected.

## Summary

This mixed-methods study focused on the perspectives of teachers and how principals influence their decision to remain teaching in urban schools. The data collected derived from a teacher survey and interview questions posed during a focus group. The researcher ensured that all identities were kept confidential. The surveys were distributed during staff meetings, as research indicated that response rates using this method tend to be higher (Nulty, 2008). Based on the willingness to participate, 12 participants were selected to be involved in two focus groups. Quantitative data were analyzed using the SSPS database and qualitative data were analyzed using research developed themes and codes. The data were reported using charts and tables, along with a narrative prepared by the researcher. Chapter 4 will report the findings of the data collected.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

The focal point for this study was to examine teacher perspectives of retention practices and behaviors of urban elementary school principals. An in-depth examination of the literature provided a rationale to conduct a study about teacher retention practices and behaviors of urban principals, and the overarching qualitative research question was:

RQ1. What personal and professional behaviors do urban principals exhibit which may contribute to high levels of teacher retention and stability?

The following supporting qualitative research questions also guided the research:

RQ2. What is the association between the challenges faced by urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?

RQ3. What is the association between the professional development opportunities provided to urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?

RQ4. What is the association between urban school demographics/diversity and teacher retention rates?

RQ5. What are teachers' perception of principal's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding teacher retention?

The study followed the mixed-method research design as described in Chapter 3 and the data were drawn from a teacher survey as well as two focus groups. Analysis of these data produced teacher perceptions of urban principals' retention behaviors/practices, specifically in the areas of (a) urban school challenges, (b) professional development opportunities, and (c) urban school demographics/diversity. Table 1 describes the alignment of the research questions, survey questions, and focus group questions.

Table 1

*Research Questions and Data Collection Alignment*

| Research Questions  | Quantitative | Teacher Survey |             | Focus Group |
|---|--------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
|   |              | Questions      | Qualitative | Questions   |
| Challenges Faced by Urban Teachers (1)                          | Yes          | 1-7            | Yes         | 1-2         |
| Professional Development Opportunities (2)                      | Yes          | 8-17           | Yes         | 3-4         |
| Demographics/Diversity (3)                                      | Yes          | 18-21          | Yes         | 5           |
| Teacher perception of principal attitudes/beliefs Behaviors (4) | No           | N/A            | Yes         | 6-7         |

## Participants

There were seven schools solicited to participate in the study and approximately 210 teacher participants were contacted to complete the survey. A sum of 120 surveys were completed and returned (57%) satisfying the response rate projected in Chapter 3, which was 50-60% (105-126). A 50-60% response rate provided an acceptable level of confidence to guide the researcher in making generalizations from the information obtained (Baruch, 1999; Baruch & Holton, 2008; Nulty, 2008).

From the teacher survey, demographic data, and consent form, the researcher solicited 12 teachers to participate in two focus groups, both with six participants. Only those participants who expressed an interest in participating in the focus group were contacted. Participants were selected from all seven schools in the sample and were represented between the two focus groups.

## Quantitative Demographic Data

A total of 120 teachers completed the survey which assessed the challenges faced, professional development, and school demographics/diversity during the course of the school

year. The demographic composition of the respondents was as follows: 108 (90%) were females and 12 (10%) were male teachers. There was a wide age range of participants: 67 (55.8%) were between the ages of 20-30 years old while 52 (43.2%) were between 41-60 years old; only one teacher was over 60 years old. The years of teaching experience also varied with 19 (15.9%) between 0-5 years of experience, 62 (51.6%) had between 6-15 years of experience, 21 (17.5%) had between 16-20 years, and 18 (15.0%) had over 20 years of teaching experience. Based on the highest degree earned by the participants, 21 (17.5%) had earned a bachelor's degree, 51 (42.5%) earned a master's degree, 36 (30.0%) had earned a specialist degree, and 12 (10.0%) had earned a doctoral degree.

### Quantitative Results

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the comparative analysis between the independent variables (challenges faced, professional development, and school demographics/diversity) and dependent variable (years of experience). The Teacher Survey used for this study included the following Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4); Agree (3); Disagree (2); and Strongly Disagree (1). The quantitative data were organized by research questions (Rq), hypotheses (Ho), and ANOVA analysis.

Rq1: What is the difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience?

Ho1: There is no statistical significant difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience.

Ho1a: There is a statistical significant difference between challenges faced of urban teachers and their years of experience.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there was a statistical significant difference between challenges faced by urban teachers and their years of experience, as well as the mean. The two-tail significance value of 0.527 was greater than the 0.050 level of significance established for the study; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. There was no significant difference between challenges faced by urban teachers and their years of experience. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) findings for the null hypothesis are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

Table 2

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results for Rq1*

| Descriptive Data |     |        |           |
|------------------|-----|--------|-----------|
| Variable         | N   | Mean   | Std. Dev. |
| 0-2 years        | 2   | 2.4286 | .40406    |
| 3-5 years        | 17  | 2.9916 | .49865    |
| 6-10 years       | 31  | 2.8295 | .65923    |
| 11-15 years      | 31  | 3.0507 | .63626    |
| 16-20 years      | 21  | 3.0204 | .59124    |
| Over 20 years    | 18  | 2.9841 | .44069    |
| Total            | 120 | 2.9595 | .58747    |

Table 3

*ANOVA Findings for Rq1*

| Groups         | Sum of Sqs | df  | Mean Sq. | F-ratio | Sig. |
|----------------|------------|-----|----------|---------|------|
| Between Groups | 1.452      | 5   | .290     | .836    | .527 |
| Within Groups  | 39.617     | 114 | .348     |         |      |
| Total          | 41.069     | 119 |          |         |      |

Rq2: What is the difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience?

Ho2: There is no statistical significant difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience.

Ho2a: There is a statistical significant difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there was a statistical significant difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience. The two-tail significance value of 0.572 was greater than the 0.050 level of significance established for the study; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. There was no significant difference between professional development opportunities of urban teachers and their years of experience. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results for the null hypothesis are presented in Tables 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 4

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results for Rq2*

| <i>Descriptive Data</i> |     |        |           |
|-------------------------|-----|--------|-----------|
| Variable                | N   | Mean   | Std. Dev. |
| 0-2 years               | 2   | 2.7000 | .42426    |
| 3-5 years               | 17  | 2.7824 | .37622    |
| 6-10 years              | 31  | 2.7710 | .54662    |
| 11-15 years             | 31  | 2.9710 | .56107    |
| 16-20 years             | 21  | 2.9714 | .61085    |
| Over 20 years           | 18  | 2.8500 | .35851    |
| Total                   | 120 | 2.8700 | .51476    |

Table 5

*ANOVA Findings for Rq2*

| Groups         | Sum of Sqs | Df  | Mean Sq. | F-ratio | Sig. |
|----------------|------------|-----|----------|---------|------|
| Between Groups | 1.032      | 5   | .206     | .771    | .572 |
| Within Groups  | 30.500     | 114 | .268     |         |      |
| Total          | 31.532     | 119 |          |         |      |

Rq3: What is the difference between demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience?

Ho3: There is no statistical significant difference between demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience.

Ho3a: There is a statistical significant difference between school demographics/diversity of urban schools and years of urban teachers' experience.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there was a statistical significant difference between demographics/diversity of urban schools and urban teachers' experience. The two-tail significance value of 0.688 was greater than the 0.050 level of significance established for the study; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. There was no significant difference between school demographics/diversity of urban schools and teachers' years of experience. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) findings for the research null hypothesis are presented in Tables 6 and 7, respectively.



Table 6

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results for Rq3*

| Descriptive Data |     |        |           |
|------------------|-----|--------|-----------|
| Variable         | N   | Mean   | Std. Dev. |
| 0-2 years        | 2   | 2.7500 | .35355    |
| 3-5 years        | 17  | 2.6765 | .22989    |
| 6-10 years       | 31  | 2.5081 | .62744    |
| 11-15 years      | 31  | 2.6290 | .44192    |
| 16-20 years      | 21  | 2.6905 | .43232    |
| Over 20 years    | 18  | 2.7083 | .48696    |
| Total            | 120 | 2.6292 | .47741    |

Table 7

*ANOVA Findings for Rq3*

| Groups         | Sum of Sqs | df  | Mean Sq. | F-ratio | Sig. |
|----------------|------------|-----|----------|---------|------|
| Between Groups | .714       | 5   | .143     | .616    | .688 |
| Within Groups  | 26.409     | 114 | .232     |         |      |
| Total          | 27.123     | 119 |          |         |      |

## Qualitative Demographic Data

Focus group participants volunteered to participate based on their interest in the study during the quantitative phase. Priority was given to participants who volunteered first, and all seven schools were represented between the two focus groups. Twelve teachers were selected, and sent correspondence suggesting dates and times to meet (see Appendix C). Based on responses from this correspondence, participants were grouped, two dates were selected, and

participants were notified. Tables 8 and 9 denote the characteristics of participants in Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2.

Table 8

*Characteristics of Focus Group 1 Participants*

| Participant | Gender | Age | Years of Experience. | Highest Degree         |
|-------------|--------|-----|----------------------|------------------------|
| A           | Female | 39  | 10                   | Master's Degree        |
| B           | Female | 41  | 17                   | Educational Specialist |
| C           | Female | 31  | 8                    | Master's Degree        |
| D           | Female | 43  | 15                   | Educational Specialist |
| E           | Female | 38  | 11                   | Educational Specialist |
| F           | Female | 34  | 12                   | Master's Degree        |

Table 9

*Characteristics of Focus Group 2 Participants*

| Participant | Gender | Age | Years of Experience. | Highest Degree         |
|-------------|--------|-----|----------------------|------------------------|
| A           | Female | 46  | 25                   | Educational Specialist |
| B           | Female | 63  | 36                   | Master's Degree        |
| C           | Male   | 39  | 18                   | Doctorate              |
| D           | Female | 30  | 7                    | Bachelor's Degree      |
| E           | Female | 50  | 17                   | Master's Degree        |
| F           | Female | 33  | 10                   | Master's Degree        |

Eleven of the focus group participants were female, and one was male. Their ages ranged from 24 to 63 years. Years of experience spanned from 7 to 36. Only one participant had reached the bachelor's degree level, while the remaining 11 had advanced degrees including

master's degrees, educational specialist's degrees, and one teacher had obtained a doctoral degree.

### Qualitative Results

Analysis of the focus group data was done in two stages. During stage 1, the researcher read the transcripts from each focus group separately, and made notes which linked ideas, concepts, and thoughts similar in nature. Additionally, the researcher identified group responses that best generalized the ideas, thoughts, and concepts to be developed into themes. In stage 2, the researcher linked patterns and developed sub-themes which were then directly aligned to the predetermined categories and research questions designed for this study.

#### Stage 1 Analysis: Focus Group (FG) Response

The following are selected focus group responses. The researcher chose responses which best generalized and summarized the discussion from both focus groups (12 participants). The summary responses were chosen based on the frequency and repetition of concepts or ideas presented in the discussions; therefore, the number of quotes selected varied for each focus group question.

*Focus group question 1.* How do you describe your role as an urban teacher? How do you think it differs from those not teaching in the urban environment?

Response A: "The urban teacher plays many roles, whatever the student needs at any given time. This could be a family member, counselor, doctor, lawyer, or friend" (FG1, Participant 3, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response B: "My role is very challenging due to the lack of experiences or resources students have" (FG2, Participant 3, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Response C: “The urban teacher differs from the suburban teacher because many of them have students who are prepared for school and have access to resources that urban teachers do not” (FG2, Participant 5, personal communication, January 24, 2015)

*Focus group question 2.* What are some challenges you face as an urban educator?

Please describe what you feel the causes of these challenges are.

Response A: “My biggest challenge is lack of parental support” (FG1, Participant 1, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response B: “Children coming to school unprepared” (FG 1, Participant 4, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response C: “Students’ unruly and disruptive behavior is a daily challenge for me” (FG1, Participant 6, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response D: “I feel like the major cause of my challenges is poverty and lack of community” (FG 2, Participant 3, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

*Focus group question 3.* How does your principal provide professional learning opportunities for you?

Response A: “My principal makes opportunities available to us frequently” (FG1, participant 3, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response B: “The PD we receive is about once a month, but I don’t think that is frequent enough based on the population we serve. We need to learn much more about how to best support urban students” (FG1, Participant 2, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response C: “Our PL comes from the district and is always about data. It doesn’t necessarily meet the needs my students have that the data doesn’t reveal” (FG2, Participant 2, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Response D: “We do receive trainings and professional learning, but a lot of times is not applicable to the learning style of lack of experience for urban students. I need support with remediating the curriculum to meet the direct needs of kids who are struggling with not only academic issues, but social and economic ones as well” (FG2, Participant 4, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Response E: “I have yet to attend a PL that is geared towards students who are working 2-4 grade levels below and this is what I need” (FG2, Participant 6, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

*Focus group question 4.* What does the teacher mentor program look like at your school? Elaborate on the learning process for teachers new to the profession, specifically the urban environment.

Response A: “Teacher mentoring? There is no program like this that exists at my school” (FG1, Participant 2, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response B: “Most new teachers are left alone to find their way, or they work together to figure things out” (FG1, Participant 3, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response C: “The only thing I have ever seen like this is the older or veteran teachers show new teachers the ropes” (FG 1, Participant 5, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response D: “This is something that is needed. I have seen so many new teachers come in and leave within or right after the first year because they could not handle the kids. No one was there to show them the ropes. It was like they were thrown to the wolves, and it was either sink or swim” (FG 2, Participant 3, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

*Focus group question 5:* How does your principal celebrate diversity or provide opportunities for both teachers and students to express their cultural differences?

Response A: “We have no diversity at our school, and the principal does not provide any opportunities for us to celebrate or learn about other cultures” (FG1, Participant 4, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response B: “We have an ELL teacher, but I don’t think this should be considered celebrating diversity because it is mandated by the state” (FG1, Participant 6, personal communications, January 17, 2015).

Response C: “We have very little diversity at our school. The population is mostly African American with a few Hispanics. We don’t teach or celebrate cultural differences, and a lot of times the students tease or bully one another about their differences. We have not taught tolerance and acceptance, and it has led to issues” (FG2, Participant 1, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Response D: “In my school we do have diversity, but we do not celebrate or acknowledge cultural differences” (FG2, Participant 6, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

*Focus group question 6:* What influence does your principal have on your decision to remain teaching in the urban environment? Describe any leadership attributes they display or should display that have an effect on said decision.

Response A: “My principal has no influence on my decision to remain in the urban environment” (FG1, Participant 1, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response B: “My principal’s support is essential, yet he has a negative effect on my decision because he is too busy working on managing the building as opposed to being an instructional leader. I do not feel appreciated or supported by him” (FG1, Participant 2, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response C: “He supports my decision to want to stay here. He is honest, fair, knowledgeable, and accessible” (FG1, Participant 5, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response D: “My principal has a direct hand in creating a negative working environment. I think about leaving every year” (FG1, Participant 6, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response E: “My principal positively effects my decision to stay. What I like about her is that she will roll up her sleeves and support the teacher when they need it. She is grounded in her work for children and remembers what it is like to be in the classroom. She knows her students and teachers, and differentiates the support she gives them” (FG2, Participant 1, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Response F: “Attributes leaders should display include knowing and understanding the economic status of the community, be resourceful, be honest, and spend time getting to know their teachers. Administrators should want all their teachers to be successful and work hard at making that happen” (FG2, Participant 2, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Response G: “I think it is very important for the leader to have a strong foundation in the curriculum and standards. To be an instructional leader first” (FG2, Participant 4, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Response H: “Urban leaders should know their community, be fair, and never ask things of their teachers they would never do” (FG2, Participant 5, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

*Focus group question 7.* All things considered, suppose you had one minute to discuss with your principal how his/her leadership practices have influenced your attitude and beliefs about teaching in the urban environment. What would you say and why?

Response A: “Help us to understand the link between learning and leadership. I think you need to inspire your teachers to be better leaders in their classroom” (FG1, Participant 4, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response B: “Be cognizant of what you say, and how you say it. Everything you say has an effect on us- be it negative or positive” (FG1, Participant 5, personal communication, January 17, 2015).

Response C: “Lead from the aspect of a teacher. Never forget what it’s like to be in the classroom” (FG2, Participant 3, personal communication, January 24, 2015).



Response D: “Listen more. You have many experts in your building, make sure you draw the best out of everyone” (FG2, Participant 6, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Response E: “Remember that teaching is an art, it takes time to develop, and is unique per the individual. Let you teachers be individuals as long as we stay in realm of the curriculum and implement best practices” (FG2, Participant 1, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

### Research Questions

#### Stage 2 Analysis: Theme Development

Transcript analysis and coding revealed patterns and themes associated with predetermined categories. Each focus group question was aligned to a research question and a predetermined category.

RQ1: What is the association between the challenges faced by urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?

#### Category 1: Challenges Faced by Urban Teachers

All focus participants discussed the challenges they faced as urban educators in an elementary setting. The focus group questions designed for category one solicited participants to discuss challenges they face as urban teachers, describe their role as urban teachers, specifically how it differed from those teaching in non-urban settings. They were also asked to detail specifics regarding those challenges. The responses given were categorized into themes; which were conceptualized based on the pattern and frequency of ideas and thoughts.

Theme 1: The Urban Teacher has many roles outside of teaching. Five out of the 12 focus group participants (42%) identified various roles other than teaching as one of their many

challenges. These participants identified that the urban teacher has to serve many roles for the urban student. These roles were characterized as mother, father, nurse, counselor, lawyer, advocate, tutor, cook, provider, friend, loan officer, social worker, etc. These many roles were described as a challenge by the following statement:

I have to wear these many hats before I can wear the hat of teacher. Many of my students come to school having not eaten, not wearing clean clothes, having witnessed some atrocity in the neighborhood related to crime, abuse, or drugs. I must break through all of this before any learning can take place. (FG1, Participant 5, personal communication, January 17, 2015)

Another participant described her role as advocate:

If my students come to school late, they may miss breakfast, and the cafeteria is closed. They get really upset, and I have to either strike a bargain with the cafeteria manager to make an exception for the student, and allow them to get cereal so they will be ready for learning. (FG2, Participant 2, personal communication, January 24, 2015)

Theme 2: Lack of Resources. Seven out of the 12 participants (58%) discussed lack of resources as a major challenge. The lack of resources may include teaching and curriculum resources, technological resources, and basic supplies such as writing utensils and paper. This challenge poses a hardship for both the teacher and student; further, if basic tools are not in place for teaching and learning to take place, then the job of teaching and learning will not be done effectively. One teacher described the following:

I am often spending my own money to provide resources for my students. Although we are a Title I school, much of that money may be spent on teacher positions, and we are left to find materials on our own. Every day I give out pencils and paper, and it is really

beginning to have a negative effect on my bank account. It is unfair. (FG1, Participant 5, personal communication, January 17, 2015)

Theme 3: Student Behavior. Eight out of the 12 participants (67%) stated that student behavior/discipline was a big challenge or barrier for them in the classroom. Student behavior was described as lack of motivation, disrespectful discourse and behavior, defiance, and bullying. A participant noted the following:

My students are constantly teasing and taunting one another, and there is a fight at my school almost every day. When I try to correct these negative behaviors, the students disrespect me, use foul language and gestures, and tell me that I am not their parent. When the other students see one kid doing this and getting away with it, they begin to mimic these behaviors, and it becomes a snowball effect. It is so difficult trying to work around student behavior, and it really impedes the learning environment. (FG2, Participant 5, personal communication, January 24, 2015)

Another participant stated:

My students have very little respect for the adults in the building. I attribute it to the lack of adult role models, and although it is not every student, it is a good majority of them. They are very combative and defensive, and it is almost like a defense mechanism they use to protect themselves from all of the issues they deal with at home and in the neighborhood. (FG1, Participant 1, personal communication, January 17, 2015)

Theme 4: Students with Low Readiness Skills. Nine of the 12 participants (75%) described low readiness skills as a challenge. This was characterized as students performing below or far below grade or developmental expectations. This was one of the major themes noted by the participants. The following was said by participants:

The lack of exposure that students have is very challenging. They typically don't travel very much, or have much prior knowledge when they come to school. Many of the students come to school unprepared, and it is my challenge to find out what will motivate the child to learn. (FG2, Participant 1, personal communication, January 24, 2015);

Every year, I receive students who are below grade level standards for the grade they just completed. So, if I teach second grade, I am dealing with more than half of my class performing at a kindergarten level or below. It is tragic and disheartening for me as the teacher. (FG1, Participant 4, personal communications, January 17, 2015)

Theme 5: Lack of Parental Support. Eleven of the 12 participants (92%) described lack of parental support as their biggest challenge. This was detailed as an essential component of student success, and one of the prevalent obstacles noted. Participants were quoted by saying:

My biggest challenge is a lack of parental support. Not in the classroom but at home. The student is left to complete their homework independently, and of course they do not complete the assignments. ...I feel like parents make the choice to not be involved. (FG1, Participant 5, January 17, 2015);

Whether they are educated or not, concern doesn't take a higher degree of education. Some parents just put their kids off on the teacher and only concern for menial things, such as a kid getting their cell phone. ... Parents are unaccountable for their actions and consistently hold the teachers solely responsible for the education of their students. (FG2, Participant 5, January 24, 2015);

It is very hard to get parents to come up to the school, and sometimes they don't even answer the phone, so it makes it much harder to provide a quality education. ...I think some parents have forgotten the importance of school, and they don't really reinforce that

importance in their children. So it's like we are fighting a constant battle, with us trying to get them to realize how important school and education is, but then it's not reinforced anywhere else other than school. (FG2, Participant 1, personal communication, January 24, 2015)

RQ2: What is the association between the professional development opportunities provided to urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools? Describe how they affect your effectiveness as an urban teacher.

### Category 2: Professional Development

All focus group participants described their experiences with professional learning in the urban environment. The focus group questions designed for this category asked participants to discuss these experiences created by their principal and its effectiveness in supporting their work in the urban environment. Additionally, they were asked to describe teacher mentoring programs in their district or school.

Theme 1: Professional Development Opportunities are not effective. Twelve out of 12 participants expressed that they do receive professional development opportunities frequently, and they are not effective for several reasons. Several sub-themes were developed based on these identified reasons.

Subtheme 1: Professional Development is disjointed from current curriculum

Seven out of 12 participants (58%) stated the professional development is misaligned with what is already mandated or being implemented. The following was noted:

We do receive (PD) every week, but a lot of times it is just something else to do, or it doesn't fit in at all with what we already do, so it becomes confusing and

frustrating for both the teachers and students. (FG1, Participant 2, personal communication, January 17, 2015);

...Before we have a chance to fully learn or implement one initiative, or best practice, we are being bombarded with something else that we are expected to do. It is just too overwhelming. (FG1, Participant 5, personal communication, January 17, 2015)

Subtheme 2: Professional Development is not applicable to urban students. Ten out of the 12 participants noted that the professional development they receive does not always transfer easily into the urban environment, or their student population. A summarizing quote from one participant describes this thought:

In my opinion, we need more PD opportunities which highlight strategies to teach students who have major holes in their foundation, or are several grade levels behind academically. My students may be in the right place developmentally, but not academically. What do I do? How do I effectively teach phonics to a fifth grader who is embarrassed to read books that are for kindergarten? I need help bridging the gap, but every presenter I have asked has little to no answers for me. (FG2, Participant 2, personal communications, January 24, 2015)

RQ3: What is the association between urban school demographics/diversity and teacher retention rates?

### Category 3: School Demographics/Diversity

Focus group participants expressed their knowledge of diversity and demographics in their schools. The question developed for this category sought to identify how the urban leader

encourages teachers to celebrate and teach diversity and tolerance to their students. In addition, this question was designed to require the teacher to reflect on how they feel urban leaders should teach students about differences represented in their individual schools.

Theme 1: Minimal diversity in urban schools. Ten out of the 12 participants stated that there was very little diversity in their schools. Teachers described their schools as being 90+ percent African American. The remaining 10% of the schools were a mixture of Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian. This was noted by 2 of the participants: “Well, unfortunately in my school there is not a lot of diversity in our building. Every face looks the same. ...There is a huge lack of diversity in our school altogether-teachers and students” (FG1, Participant 1, personal communications, January 17, 2015).

Theme 2: Diversity is not taught or celebrated. All 12 participants stated that diversity was not celebrated at their schools. Although two participants stated they did have diversity in their schools, they further explained that diversity is not celebrated or taught in any capacity. The following quotes summarize this theme:

If it is not a common core standard, we are not allowed to elaborate on it. This is the culture at my school. We don't celebrate any diversity, and don't teach our children to practice tolerance in any way (FG2, Participant 2, personal communication, January 24, 2015); In my school, we do have some diversity. We have different cultures, but they are not celebrated (FG2, Participant 6, personal communication, January 24, 2015); Honestly, I feel that there aren't very many, if any, opportunities provided by our principal for teacher or students to express their cultural differences or to celebrate their diversity (FG2, Participant 4, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

RQ4: What are teachers' perception of principal's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding teacher retention?

#### Category 4: Influence of Principal in Teacher's Decision to Remain in Urban Setting

All participants discussed behaviors and attributes principals have or should have that would influence their decision to remain teaching in the urban environment. The focus group questions for this category were designed to discern whether or not teacher retention in urban schools is a personal decision, or if the principal has a direct effect on the decision. Additionally, teachers were asked to discuss what attributes should an urban leader have that may influence their decision to leave or stay.

Theme 1: Principal influences decision to remain teaching in an urban environment. Twelve out of the 12 participants noted that their principal has an effect on their decision to continue teaching in the urban environment. Participants stated that this can either be a positive or negative influence based on the leadership attributes the principal displays. As a result, this theme was delineated with sub-themes.

Subtheme 1: The principal has a negative effect on teacher retention Seven out of the 12 (58%) participants said that the principal had a negative effect on their decision to remain teaching in the urban environment, rather; it is a personal decision which is intrinsic. The following statements made by participants summarized this subtheme:

My principal has not influence on my decision. I choose to remain in an urban environment because I feel that I am making an influential different in the lives of children. Also, being a product of an urban district gives an extra boost or motivation. (FG1, Participant 3, personal communication, January 17, 2015);



“My principal has a large influence on why teachers leave my school. The environment and culture that he creates is negative and very hostile. He makes it difficult and very uncomfortable for us to be there” (FG1, Participant 6, personal communication, January 17, 2015); “I feel like my decision is negatively affected by my principal. I always feel like I am underappreciated by my administrator” (FG2, Participant 2, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Subtheme 2: The principal has a positive effect on teacher retention Five out of 12 participants (42%) said their principal had a positive effect on their decision to remain teaching in the urban environment. The following statements summarize this subtheme:

“My principal is very honest, supportive, and candid when it comes to decisions that need to be made for my career. I respect his opinion, and seek it out when I am in limbo, about leaving” (FG1, Participant 1, personal communication, January 17, 2015); “My principal’s support is essential in my decision. His leadership allows for learning opportunities to take place, and I feel comfortable trying new concepts within my classroom” (FG1, Participant 6, personal communication, January 17, 2015); “My principal is fair, and is willing to roll up her sleeves and help teachers when they need it. She is not afraid to work with kids, and her work is grounded with the kids” (FG2, Participant 3, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

Theme 2: Positive Attributes and Behaviors of Urban Principals which influence decision to remain teaching in urban schools. All participants (100%) stated or suggested positive attributes and behaviors that urban principals display or should display which would encourage teachers to remain teaching in the urban environment. The following attributes/ behaviors were

described and identified by focus group participants as behaviors or attributes that principals have or should have which would influence their decision to remain in the urban environment: fairness, honesty, consistency, openness, knowledge and/or understanding of urban community, strong instructional leadership skills, compassion and/or empathy, clear vision and ability to make strong connections with all stakeholders. Table 10 summarizes the themes developed for each category of Stage 2 analysis.

Table 10

*Summary of Themes Developed for Each Category of Stage 2 Analysis*

| Themes                     |                                 |                                      |                              |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Category 1                 | Category 2                      | Category 3                           | Category 4                   |
| <i>Challenges Faced</i>    | <i>Professional Development</i> | <i>School Demographics/Diversity</i> | <i>Principal's Influence</i> |
| Roles other than teaching  | Professional development        | Minimal diversity in                 | Principal has an influence   |
| Lack of resources          | (PD) is given                   | Schools                              | on teachers' decision to     |
| Negative student behaviors | Subthemes:                      | Diversity is not taught or           | remain in an urban           |
| Low readiness skills       | 1. PD does not align with       | Celebrated                           | environment                  |
| Lack of parental support   | Current curriculum              |                                      | Subthemes:                   |
|                            | 2. PD is not applicable to      |                                      | 1. Negative influence        |
|                            | Urban students                  |                                      | 2. Positive influence        |

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perspectives of urban principals' influence on teacher retention. Chapter 4 presented an introduction, aligned the research questions to the type of data collected (quantitative or qualitative), discussed the participants, response rate, analysis of qualitative and quantitative results, and summary. Data collected from teacher surveys was explained using descriptive statistics; data collected during focus groups was coded and analyzed in two stages to both align data to research questions and to reveal themes

and subthemes. The results revealed that principals can have an effect on teachers' decision to remain teaching in the urban environment.

Tables were included to further explicate data collected from teacher surveys which were directly related to survey questions, research hypotheses, and teacher demographics. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the independent variables (challenges faced, professional development opportunities, and demographics/diversity) with the dependent variable (years of experience). Quantitative results revealed that there was no statistical difference between the challenges faced by urban teachers, the effect of professional development opportunities, diversity and demographics, and years of experience teaching. In other words, challenges faced were not different for urban teachers based on their years of experience, nor were professional development opportunities and diversity and demographics of a school.

Qualitative data was analyzed in two stages. First, transcripts from both focus groups were analyzed and organized to align with predetermined categories, and quotes were identified that summarized the thoughts of participants. Next, the transcripts were coded and analyzed to identify themes and subthemes that paralleled with the predetermined categories.

Themes were developed based on the four predetermined categories. The qualitative analysis determined five themes for Category 1 (challenges faced; roles other than teaching; lack of resources; negative student behaviors; low readiness skills; and lack of parental support). One theme and two subthemes were developed for Category 2 (Professional Development (PD)). The theme identified was that professional development was given overall; however, the subtheme 1 revealed that PD opportunities do not align with current curriculum initiatives, and subtheme 2 indicated that PD opportunities were not applicable to the learning characteristics of

urban learners. Two themes were identified for Category 3 (Demographics/Diversity): (a) there was minimal diversity in schools, and (b) diversity is not taught or celebrated in schools. The qualitative data analysis identified one theme and two subthemes for Category 4 (Principals' influence on teachers' decision to remain in urban environment). The theme identified was that principals do influence an urban teacher's decision to remain teaching in an urban environment; however, it can be a negative influence (subtheme 1) or a positive influence (subtheme 2). There were principal attributes identified by participants which positively influenced a teacher's decision to remain teaching in the urban environment.

## CHAPTER 5

## DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher retention practices implemented by urban school leaders. The researcher conducted a mixed-methods study in an effort to gain empirical data to further expound on this subject. The following qualitative research questions guided the study:

RQ1. What personal and professional behaviors do urban principals exhibit which may contribute to high levels of teacher retention and stability?

The following supporting qualitative research questions also guided the research:

RQ2. What is the association between the challenges faced by urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?

RQ3. What is the association between the professional development opportunities provided to urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?

RQ4. What is the association between urban school demographics/diversity and teacher retention rates?

RQ5. What are teachers' perception of principal's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding teacher retention?

The researcher distributed surveys at urban schools during staff meetings in which the researcher gave a brief introduction of the study and solicited consent to participate. There were seven schools petitioned to participate in this survey and approximately 210 teacher participants were contacted to complete the survey; 120 surveys were completed and returned which satisfied the response rate of 50-60% projected in Chapter 3. The survey collected demographic data as well as data aligned directly to characteristics of urban schools (challenges, professional

development opportunities, school demographics/diversity, and attributes/behaviors). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the comparative analysis between the independent variables (challenges faced, professional development, and demographics/diversity) and dependent variable (years of experience). For the qualitative segment of the study, the researcher conducted two focus groups; the discussions were audio recorded and transcribed to develop themes directly related to the research questions and the aforementioned categories.

This chapter summarizes the research, discusses the findings of the study, and employs the research findings to draw conclusions. Implications of the study results supported the researcher in making recommendations for educational leaders working in urban schools, teacher preparation programs, and for further research. This chapter is divided into three sections: discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

#### Discussion

RQ2: What is the association between the challenges faced by urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?

No matter the amount of teaching experience in urban schools, teachers all faced and experienced the same challenges. Challenges presented were related to principal support in areas of discipline, teaching support, and time provided for paperwork and nonteaching tasks. All focus group participants were able to identify challenges they faced, and an overwhelming majority identified challenges that were not school-based. In other words, some of the challenges identified extended beyond the control of the principal, but not all of them. Many challenges were identified including: (a) roles other than teaching, (b) lack of resources, (c) student behavior, (d) low readiness skills, and (e) lack of parental support. These were the top five themes which emerged from the second stage of data analysis. In one of the focus groups,

there was a discussion that as an urban teacher, there were responsibilities other than teaching that served as barriers to facilitating lessons which were curriculum based. These roles were those which may have been lacking at home and often catered to the personal needs of students. The roles discussed included such responsibilities as ensuring students had eaten or had warm clothes, making sure students got home safely or were living in a safe environment, and spending personal money to make sure students had the supplies needed to be successful in school and school activities. These many roles were characterized as draining and counterproductive to the job at hand—teaching the curriculum and state standards. These roles were also related to teachers burning out quickly. This was consistent with research done on urban teacher burnout and how burnout directly related to teacher turnover (Geving, 2007; Kokkinos, 2007).

Lack of resources was identified as another major challenge faced by urban teachers. Participants referred to resources such as textbooks, educational technology, supplemental materials, and basic teaching supplies as resources which are lacking (Bryan, 2005; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Machin, McNally, & Meghir, 2010). Lack of resources was identified as a major barrier to working with urban students. Not having the necessary tools for teaching was cited as being extremely frustrating and contributed to the level of stress experienced by urban teachers. Supporting teachers by providing room in the budget for necessary supplies and supplemental resources is a way that urban leaders can counteract this challenge. Additionally, urban principals should solicit needs from teachers to ensure the correct items are being ordered or required.

Negative student behavior was identified as a challenge for urban teachers and posed as a huge barrier to teaching and learning. Negative behavior must be channeled in a positive light and teachers need to be able to manage student behaviors effectively in order for students to

learn. Student behavior that is disruptive and disrespectful can cause many problems in the classroom, not only for the students displaying the negative behavior, but also for those being exposed to it (Brown, 2004; Jacob, 2007; Lannie & McCurdy, 2007). Students in urban classrooms tend to display more negative behaviors in the classroom, and this concern can lead to quicker levels of burnout and stress for teachers. Professional learning opportunities related to classroom management and effective teaching strategies which engage students will provide urban principals the opportunity to engage with teachers and support them in counteracting this challenge.

A lack of or low school readiness skills of urban students was overwhelmingly identified. An overall lack of exposure of students was recognized as posing a key obstacle for teaching grade-level standards and curriculum. When students are struggling to meet grade level standards, teachers are forced to remediate skills and have to make an attempt at helping students work towards grade-level appropriate goals (Fantuzzo, McWayne, & Perry, 2004; Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Shearer, McDermott, McWayne, Frye, & Perlman, 2007; Wesley & Buyusse, 2003). Additionally, a lack of background knowledge and exposure to real world experiences serve as a barrier to the teaching and learning of urban students. Principals can help stabilize this challenge for urban teachers again by providing professional learning (PL) in how to best remediate and expose students to real world experiences to help accelerate learning experiences and grade-level goals.

Parental support was the biggest challenge to teaching in urban schools and pertinent to student success, no matter what type of environment (urban, suburban, or rural). Teachers need skills and curriculum concepts reinforced at home to aid in long-lasting learning. Parental support also plays a role in supporting acceptable student behavior at school and readiness skills.



When parental support is in place, many of the other challenges noted by participants was lessened. Parents are a child's first teacher, and they set the stage for learning the first five years of life. Students need to know that parents and teachers are working together for their success, and once this is conveyed, students have a better chance of thriving academically and socially (Jeynes, 2005; McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003; Trotman, 2001). Principals cannot make a parent participate or volunteer at the school, but they still have opportunities to support the teacher in counteracting this challenge. This can be done through efforts to improve parental support, providing workshops and resources for parents, and again, providing professional learning opportunities for teachers related to how to best support students with little to no parental support.

RQ3: What is the association between the professional development opportunities provided to urban teachers and teacher retention rates in urban schools?

Regardless of years of teaching experience, teachers had the same professional development opportunities which had no effect on teachers' decisions to continue teaching in the urban environment. Throughout the data analysis, one theme emerged along with two subthemes. These themes pinpointed how urban teachers perceive the effectiveness of professional learning opportunities available to them.

Theme 1: Professional learning opportunities are not effective. Teachers were given professional learning opportunities frequently; however, the professional learning given was not effective. There was one of two reasons cited for this ineffectiveness, and these reasons were pinpointed as sub-themes.

Subtheme 1: Professional learning opportunities do not align with current curriculum initiatives. The PL opportunities did not align with what they were required to teach or

what they were teaching at that time. This was noted as a challenge because the professional learning then became ineffective or not useful. Teachers claimed this to be a major problem for them because they needed PL to support them in the work they were currently doing, so they could improve their practice. They all stated they wanted to be effective teachers and wanted to hone their teaching craft through professional learning, but the types of learning experiences they were receiving did not help them with what they were being asked to teach. The principal could have a direct effect on this teacher concern because they generally arrange and fund the professional learning opportunities for teachers. Professional learning could be supported by principals in different ways. However, the main means of supporting teachers would be to solicit from them the PL opportunities they desire to take or what they feel would best support their current efforts in the classroom.

Subtheme 2: PL opportunities are not applicable to urban students. The PL opportunities attended did not address the specific needs or learning characteristics of urban students. Urban students come to school with low readiness skills and many of them do not perform on grade level. Teachers stated that the types of PL needed are those that include strategies for remediation, specifically for students working one to four grade levels below expectations. Additionally, many of the strategies and student texts utilized in PL are not culturally responsive and based on the background experiences of urban students. Students do not respond well to the strategies or tend to get bored with the learning. The learning strategies and texts implemented for them should be closely aligned to their experiences. Many curriculum initiatives and PL opportunities do not consider these strategies.

RQ4: What is the association between urban school demographics or diversity and teacher retention rates?

No matter the amount of experience with teaching in urban schools, the demographics/diversity of the school had no different effect on a teacher's decision to remain in the urban environment. There is minimal diversity in their schools. The teachers specified that many of the schools are neighborhood schools, and reflect the demographics of particular neighborhoods or areas of the city. For the most part, the schools served students of color—mainly African American students with few Hispanics and very few others. No Caucasian students were cited as attending the seven urban schools represented in the study, and the free and reduced lunch percentage was upward of 90%. The urban teachers had very little experience with diversity and dealing with and tolerating those of other cultures and races. Additionally, students struggle with accepting people from other cultures, even when they are people of color. For example, when second language learning students transfer to an urban school, they are often teased and not accepted in social circles because of their accent and difficulty communicating with others. This is another opportunity for urban principals to remove a barrier for teachers. Simply providing opportunities to teach tolerance and explain the differences among cultures would help teachers provide students with a holistic approach to diversity and culture.

RQ5: What are teachers' perception of principal's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding teacher retention?

This question captured teachers' opinion.

Theme 1: Principals have a direct influence on teachers' decisions to remain teaching in an urban environment. This theme was delineated into two subthemes as follows:

Subtheme 1: The principal had a negative effect on teachers' decision to remain teaching in an urban environment. The principal negatively affected their decision to remain teaching in the urban environment based on principal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Participants detailed instances in which they had experienced negative behaviors displayed by principals that supported their decision to move to another school; moreover, all teachers citing negative attitudes and leadership behaviors had been employed at more than one urban elementary school or district during their career. The negative attitudes, attributes, beliefs, and behaviors identified by the focus group participants are supported by the body of literature on effective principals (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005; Knoeppel & Rinehart, 2008; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Stronge, Richard, & Cantano, 2008; Stronge, 2007).

Subtheme 2: The principal had a positive effect on teachers' decision to remain teaching in an urban environment. Of the focus group participants, 5 (42%) stated that the principal had a positive effect on their decision to remain teaching in the urban environment. Teachers described positive characteristics, behaviors, and leadership attributes displayed by principals that affected teacher retention. The positive attitudes, attributes, beliefs, and behaviors identified by the focus group participants are supported by the body of literature on effective principals (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005; Knoeppel & Rinehart, 2008; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Stronge, Richard, & Cantano, 2008; Stronge, 2007). Out of the five teachers citing these positive attributes, three of them had taught at another urban school or district due to negative principal behaviors; these teachers also stated they were very happy to finally have found a school where the leadership was effective and worked for them.

Table 11 summarizes Subthemes 1 and 2. Subtheme 1 lists negative attributes, beliefs, and behaviors of urban principals which influenced teachers' decisions to remain in the urban environment, and Subtheme 2 lists positive attributes, beliefs, and behaviors.

Table 11

*Summary of Negative and Positive Attributes, Beliefs, and Behaviors of Urban Principals*

| Subtheme 1 – Negative Attributes              | Subtheme 2 – Positive Attributes                       |
|---|--|
| Nonvisibility                                 | Consistency  |
| Authoritative leadership style                | Fairness   |
| Judgmental                                    | Empathy  |
| No celebrating of teachers' accomplishments   | Leading by example                                     |
| No knowledge/understanding of urban community | Willing to step in teachers' shoes                     |
| No modeling of expectations                   | Remembers what it is like to be in the classroom       |
| Consistent negatively stated feedback         | Removes obstacles/barriers to teaching                 |
| Little to no leadership skills                | Knows students personally/calls them by name           |
| No shared decision making                     | Leads from the heart                                   |
| Taking things personally                      | Visibility   |
|   | Supports teachers' rights                              |
|   | High expectations for all stakeholders                 |
|   | Clearly communicated Expectations                      |
|   | Good communication skills                              |
|   | Instructional leader                                   |
|   | Good listener  |
|   | Team player  |
|   | Familiarity with the community                         |
|   | Works to decrease teacher burnout                      |
|   | Resourceful  |
|   | Accessible   |
|   | Honest   |
|   | Respectful to all                                      |
|   | Solicits input from teachers for school-wide decisions |
|   | Willing to compromise                                  |

## Implications

This research study has contributed to the body of knowledge in the area of urban leadership. The study has supplied empirical data which will add to the foundational learning experiences of urban school leaders, recorded perspectives and experiences of urban teachers related to their decision to continue teaching in the urban environment, and documented how the urban principal influenced said decision. Seven schools participated in this study from a large urban district in Georgia. The study surveyed urban teachers' experiences with urban leaders and how those experiences prompted teacher retention; further, it explored teachers' ideas regarding what urban principals could do to positively affect teacher retention in urban environments. A pertinent outcome of the study was that teachers overwhelmingly stated that the principal had influence over their decision to continue teaching in the urban environment; however, it was noted that this influence could be positive or negative.

### Implications for Urban Leader Programs

Curriculum writers and program directors for colleges and universities should integrate the findings of this study into their urban leader preparation program. This study found that teachers feel strongly about urban principals having a clear connection to the urban community's dynamics and characteristics. Having a clear understanding of the characteristics of urban communities and the challenges and difficulties urban students face will lay the foundation for a strong urban leader. Teachers affirmed that this knowledge will support urban leaders in being more understanding or empathic to the struggles of the community and the impediments these struggles pose for the urban teacher. Equipped with this knowledge, urban leaders are more apt to be compassionate towards urban teachers.

### Implications for Professional Development Organizations

This study could be offered to organizations to provide professional development and learning opportunities for urban school districts, specifically those soliciting urban principals. Professional development opportunities provided by their leaders were frequently inapplicable in the urban environment. Although most of this concern lies in the hands of the urban principal, some responsibility can be absorbed by the professional development organizations. Urban teachers stated they needed more support in how to work with struggling and nonmotivated students. Many of the teachers stated that the professional development activities they attended did not cater to students who have very little background knowledge or exposure to much outside of their community. Limited schemas and lack of background knowledge can serve as a barrier to teaching and can make teaching more time consuming. Professional development should be either tailored to meet the needs of urban teachers or scaffolded to include an urban student/school component. There is no “one size fits all” professional development, and these learning experiences should be differentiated to meet the needs of all teachers.

### Implications for Urban District Leaders

This study had very clear implications for district leaders hiring and firing urban principals. Teacher retention in schools should be a major goal of an urban district. Although retaining urban principals and school leaders is important, it is much more critical that urban teachers remain because they have direct influence and daily contact with students. This study revealed that specific urban principal characteristics have an influence on teachers’ decision to remain in the urban environment. These characteristics should be included in the process of not only selecting candidates for principal positions, but when choosing professional learning opportunities as well.

## Implications for Urban Principals

Urban teachers were very distinct when describing behaviors and qualities of urban principals that would influence their decision to remain in the urban environment. This study pointed to urban principals clearly having an influence on teacher retention albeit a positive or negative influence. The implication is that urban principals should frequently assess and adjust their leadership attitudes, behaviors, and practices to ensure they are aligned to the positive characteristics identified by this study. Frequent assessment of leadership qualities by principals could aid in teacher retention in urban schools and subsequently decrease teacher turnover and attrition rates.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided insight related to urban leaders' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors which influence teacher retention. Although there is valuable information revealed through the work of this study, additional research may be needed to further expound and enrich this arena. Urban leaders not only need additional research supporting retention practices, they also need a forum to discuss and troubleshoot issues related directly to improving their work.

To further explicate the findings of this study, it is recommended that a duplicate study be done; however, the focus should be on urban secondary schools. It is advised that a mixed-methods approach be utilized for the study because a single-method approach may not yield the same level of results. This study could also be duplicated in different regions of the country to compare the results of this study.

Because this study was done from the perspective of teachers, it is highly recommended that further research be done from the perspective of urban leaders, specifically principals. This



could be done by implementing either the mixed-methods approach or qualitative approach. The final recommendation made for future research is to conduct a comparative study of retention practices in urban schools and nonurban schools. It would be informative to identify the similarities and differences between attitudes, beliefs, and leadership behavior among these two environments, and to note the differences. The purpose of a study such as this may identify whether these differences are based on school leadership skill sets or school environment.

#### Recommendations for Urban Principals

Urban teachers made some specific recommendations for urban principals which would positively affect teacher retention as follows:

1. Set up a parent academy in schools. Have a huge parental support campaign and make it a priority. The academy could support many of the other challenges identified by teachers through such an initiative (Epstein, 2001; Bryan, 2001).
2. Seek out and provide professional development opportunities for teachers that match current curriculum initiatives and align them with the learning characteristics of urban learners (Anderson & Olson, 2006; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000).
3. Never forget what it is like to be in the classroom; lead from the aspect of the teacher. In other words, keep in mind that teaching is an art which requires a level of individuality and uniqueness that should be encouraged, appreciated, and celebrated.
4. Lead from the heart, and always support and surround staff with compassion and positive energy (Crawford, 2009; Geismar & Mendelson, 1997).
5. Remain flexible in decision making and be willing to consider others' ideas and opinions (Hallinger, 2003; Leech & Fulton, 2008).

## Conclusion

This study was built upon previous research done in the area of urban teacher turnover (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Guinn, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll & May, 2011), and was born out of retention issues noted by the researcher in the urban school district in which she was employed. The researcher moved to identify the cause of high levels of teacher turnover in urban schools, completed a comprehensive review of literature which supported and validated this problem, and identified a theoretical framework used to undergird the study. After designing the methodology and seeking approval to collect data from IRB and the identified urban district, the researcher collected data by use of a teacher survey and the facilitation of two focus groups. After reviewing and analyzing the data, implications surfaced from the themes that emerged throughout data analysis. This study authenticated other research purporting that teacher turnover was higher in urban schools (Allensworth, 2009; Dove, 2004; Guin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001b) and principals have an influence on working conditions, therefore impacting teacher retention. This study was done in an attempt to aid in decreasing levels of teacher turnover rates in urban schools by providing empirical data which identified characteristics, attitudes, and leadership behaviors favorable in retaining teachers.

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher retention practices exhibited by urban principals and was addressed by executing a mixed-methods study which approached data collection by obtaining urban teacher perspectives on the subject. The quantitative section of the study surveyed teachers' opinions regarding urban leaders' behaviors, attributes, and characteristics; it also sought to determine if there was a difference between the opinions of novice teachers and veteran teachers. The qualitative section of this study further expounded on urban teachers' beliefs about retention practices employed by urban principals. All questions in

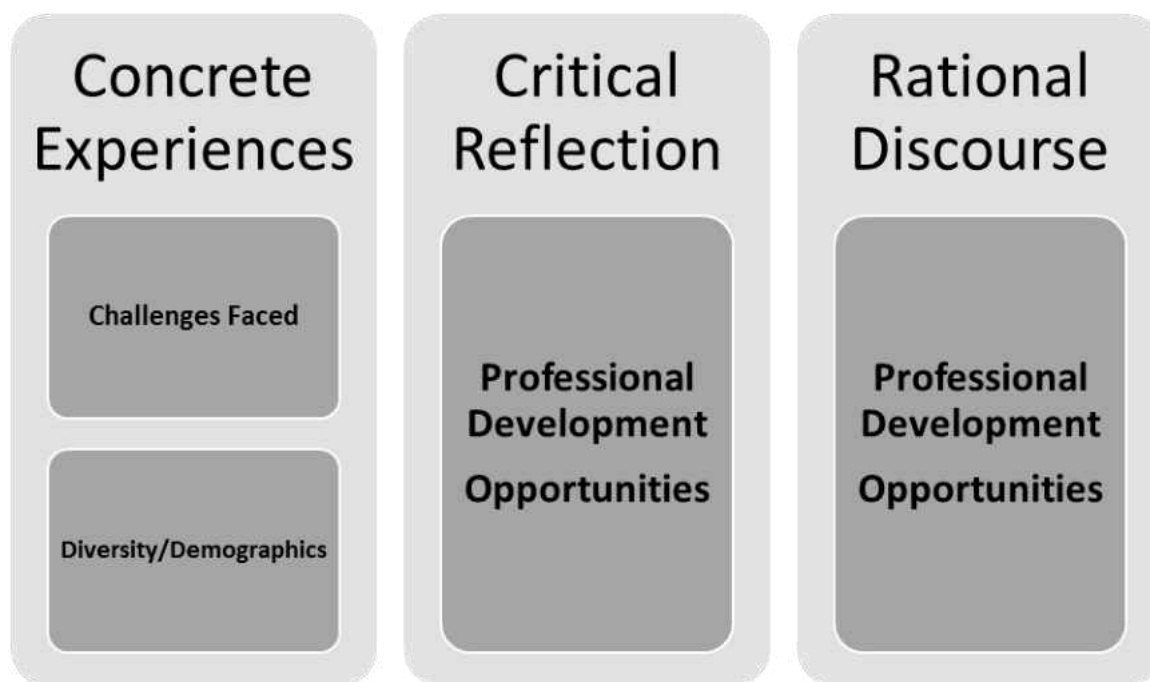
both sections of the study were directly related to predetermined categories which were based on a summation of the literature review. The categories were (a) challenges faced by urban teachers, (b) professional development opportunities, (c) demographics/diversity of urban schools, and (d) urban leader attributes, behaviors, and leadership skills which affect teachers' decision to remain in urban behaviors.

The overall finding of the study was that urban principals have a direct influence on teacher retention, and this affect can be either positive or negative. The quantitative analysis determined that principals influence urban teacher retention, no matter the years of teaching experience. Focus groups expounded on this finding and yielded specific attributes, behaviors, and leadership behaviors that directly influence teacher retention. The top attributes, behaviors, and leadership skills cited were fairness, empathy, consistency, openness, honesty, strong connection or understanding of urban communities, instructional leadership, and celebration of teacher accomplishments.

The theoretical framework serving as the basis for this study was the Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1981). This learning framework was defined by Clark (1993) as learning that induces more far-reaching change in the learner than other kinds of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the learner and produce a significant impact or paradigm shift which affects the learner's subsequent experiences. Although there are various facets of this framework, Mezirow was the leading developer of the theory and established the concepts of "meaning perspectives" and "meaning schemes." Meaning perspectives refer to one's overall view of the world. Meaning schemes are the smaller elements that work together to develop one's meaning perspective. In other words, the meaning perspective is generated during one's childhood from various meaning schemes. Mezirow viewed the meaning

perspective as the domain in which transformational learning takes place in adulthood as it develops through life experiences. For the purpose of this study and as it related to this theoretical framework, the learner referred to the teacher, and the teacher referred to the instructional leader. As instructional leaders, principals are responsible for providing learning experiences for teachers through professional development opportunities and modeling expectations, ultimately challenging teachers to reflect and expound on their meaning perspectives, and how they relate to teaching in the urban environment. The teacher's life experiences and meaning schemes serve as the starting point for transformational learning.

The Transformative Learning Theory paralleled well with the findings of this study. Overall, it was revealed that principals do have an effect on teachers' decision to remain teaching in the urban environment, albeit positive or negative. When analyzing the results through the lens of the Transformative Learning Theory, it can be said that the urban principal has a direct influence on teachers' retention because they are the ones who provide and scaffold career related learning experiences for teachers. Therefore, when working with teachers and choosing professional development opportunities, principals have the opportunity to clear up misconceptions and provide learning experiences for teachers such as teaching cultural differences and tolerance, which will require teachers to critically reflect on their ideals. This may support teachers in dealing with the challenges of working in the urban environment, therefore aiding in the retention of urban teachers. The Transformative Learning Theory's major phases and components were concrete experiences, critical reflection, and rational discourse. Figure 2 depicts the relationships between the Transformative Learning Theory's components and the categories identified for this study.



*Figure 2.* Relationship between the Transformative Learning Theory's Components and Study Categories

Finally, the perception of teachers regarding principal influence on retention was that principals influenced their decision to remain in the urban environment, and this influence was either positive or negative. Principals can counteract challenges faced by urban teachers through the use of professional development opportunities and viable learning experiences aligned to the specific needs of those working in the urban environment. These learning experiences should be inclusive of diversity/cultural awareness, as well as those related to student economic differences. Additionally, the Transformative Learning Theory was optimal in providing these experiences for teachers, as the urban leader can serve as a liaison to bridge the gap from teachers' experiences developed in childhood and the learning experiences needed to support and teach urban students. This study can be utilized by those developing curriculum for urban leaders and urban leader preparation programs, those working to develop professional

development opportunities for urban leaders and teachers, those working to employ effective urban leaders, and of course, urban principals. The desire of the researcher is that this information will be utilized to help increase the retention rates of urban principals, as ultimately retaining highly qualified teachers in urban areas will help close the achievement gap for urban students.

#### Dissemination

There is much left to do in the area of urban education, specifically as it relates to teacher retention. As an urban educator and self-proclaimed change agent for urban schools, the following are future goals for the researcher. These goals were derived and developed from the results of this study and are aimed at continuing the work that supports urban teachers and principals in improving retention in urban schools.

1. Publish a “survival guide” for novice urban teachers.
2. Publish an urban teacher retention handbook for urban principals and district leaders.
3. Develop and provide consulting services and professional learning opportunities for urban teachers and leaders.
4. Campaign for, design, and teach college-level coursework for preservice teachers and for urban principals.

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APPENDIX A  
TEACHER SURVEY

This survey is designed to be completed by teachers only. All information you provide will remain confidential.

Do not put your name or any form of identification on this survey.

Below are a number of statements describing teacher activities. Read each statement carefully, and indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree.

| Statement  | Strongly<br>Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree |
|--|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|
| 1. The principal has established guidelines for discipline in the classroom.   |                   |       |          |                      |
| 2. The principal has supplied adequate teacher and student supplies.   |                   |       |          |                      |
| 3. The principal provides adequate time for completion of paperwork such as grading papers, report cards, and grade books. |                   |       |          |                      |
| 4. The principal provides examples of successful classroom furniture arrangements.   |                   |       |          |                      |
| 5. The principal suggests teaching strategies for use in the classroom.  |                   |       |          |                      |
| 6. The principal provides professional development opportunities.  |                   |       |          |                      |
| 7. The principal solicits input from teachers about educational issues   |                   |       |          |                      |
| 8. The principal provides teachers with new trends in curriculum and instruction.  |                   |       |          |                      |
| 9. The principal involves teachers in conducting workshops and in-services.  |                   |       |          |                      |
| 10. The principal provides constructive feedback on teacher performance.   |                   |       |          |                      |
| 11. The principal provides opportunities for teachers to observe other teachers within the building.                       |                   |       |          |                      |
| 12. The teacher has established guidelines for teacher-parent conferences.   |                   |       |          |                      |
| 13. The principal facilitates adequate mentor support for teachers.  |                   |       |          |                      |

## APPENDIX A CONT'D

| Statement  | Strongly<br>Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree |
|--|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|
| 14. The principal provides adequate planning time for peer collaboration.  |                   |       |          |                      |
| 15. The principal provides time for teachers to observe teachers in other buildings.                                       |                   |       |          |                      |
| 16. The principal expects teachers to participate in after school programs such as extended day.                           |                   |       |          |                      |
| 17. The principal expects teacher to tutor students before/after required work hours.                                      |                   |       |          |                      |
| 18. The principal expect teachers to join committees such as Cinco de Mayo, Christmas, and Black History Month Committees. |                   |       |          |                      |
| 19. The principal encourages faculty and staff to live in the neighborhood in which they work.                             |                   |       |          |                      |
| 20. The principal is aware of the economic differences between faculty and students.                                       |                   |       |          |                      |
| 21. Principals encourage teachers to participate in classes that enhance multicultural awareness.                          |                   |       |          |                      |

Please provide any additional information you would like to add:

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## APPENDIX B

## PERMISSION TO USE INSTRUMENT

From: Young, Kelley [kelyoung@atlanta.k12.ga.us]  
Sent: Wednesday, January 15, 2014 8:04 AM  
To: Simpson, Claudine L  
Subject: PLEASE HELP!!!

Good Morning Dr. Simpson!

My name is Kelley Young, and I am currently a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University, attempting to complete my dissertation in Educational Leadership. I have been an educator for over 15 years, 12 of those being in the Atlanta Public School system. During my tenure here in Atlanta, I have noticed the difficulty my district has retaining teachers due to various reasons, but primarily the issues associated with urban schools. I am currently writing Chapter 3 of my study, and in search of a survey. My study is focused on the work of urban school leaders, and behavior they exhibit that may (or may not) support or possibly increase teacher retention rates in urban environments. I happened upon your dissertation, and after reviewing it, I would like your permission to utilize your teacher survey. It was very well put together, and poses all the right questions. I was told by my committee chair, that I should reach out to you, and ask your permission. I would greatly appreciate your permission, as I do work full time, am a single mother of two, and this would REALLY save me some time. Please contact me if you would like more information about my work, or have any questions for me. I can be reached via email, or by phone at 678-471-4849. My personal email address is [kellyyoung76@yahoo.com](mailto:kellyyoung76@yahoo.com)

Thank you in advance for your response.

From: Simpson, Claudine L <Claudine.L.Simpson@lonestar.edu>  
Sent: Wednesday, January 15, 2014 9:33 AM  
To: Young, Kelley  
Subject: RE: PLEASE HELP!!!

Dear Ms. Young,

It warms my heart that you are studying the work of urban school leaders and their behavior towards novice teachers. In my professional opinion it is vital that novice teachers are supported by their direct leaders. The field of teaching suffers when we lose our teachers from lack of support. With that said I give you permission to utilize the teacher survey from my dissertation. I look forward to reading your dissertation. Stay focused on your beliefs in regards to your topic and your writing will be easy. Regards,

Claudine Simpson, Ph.

## APPENDIX C

## FOCUS GROUP INVITATION

December 2014

Dear Colleague,

Please accept this as a personal invitation to attend a Focus Group Meeting.

The topic for discussion will be urban teacher retention practices in urban elementary schools. The purpose of the focus group is to collect data and expound on your ideas, thoughts, and feelings related to how urban leaders affect your decision to remain teaching in the urban environment.

Your attendance at this meeting would be greatly appreciated

Please contact Kelley J. Young at 678-471-4849 or [kellyjyoung76@yahoo.com](mailto:kellyjyoung76@yahoo.com) to confirm your attendance. If you have questions prior to the Focus Group Meeting please do not hesitate to contact me.

Warmest Regards,

Kelley J. Young, Ed.S.

\_\_\_ I would like to participate in the focus group. I am able to meet at any one of the following times:

- \_\_\_ 7:00 PM, Friday, Jan. 9
- \_\_\_ 1:00 PM, Saturday, Jan. 10
- \_\_\_ 7:00 PM, Friday, Jan. 16
- \_\_\_ 10:00 AM, Saturday, Nov. 17
- \_\_\_ 4:00 PM, Saturday, Nov. 17
- \_\_\_ 1:00 PM, Sunday, Jan. 18
- \_\_\_ 4:00 PM, Sunday, Jan. 18
- \_\_\_ 8:00 PM, Friday, Jan. 23
- \_\_\_ 11:00 AM, Saturday, Jan. 24
- \_\_\_ 2:00 PM, Sunday, Jan. 25

(Please check as many as are convenient. I will schedule a meeting at one of your preferred times.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D  
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

This survey is designed to be completed by teachers. All information you provide will remain confidential.

Do not put your name or any form of identification on this survey.  
If you have any questions, please call Kelley Young at 678-471-4849

For each of the following items, put an X besides the choice that best describes you.

Gender:

Male  Female

Age:

20-30  31-40  41-50  51-60  Over 60

Number of Years Teaching:

0-2  3-5  6-10  11-15  16-20  Over 20

Highest Degree:

Bachelor's  Master's  Specialist  Doctorate

## APPENDIX E

## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How do you describe your role as an urban teacher? How do you think it differs from those not teaching in similar environments?
2. What are some challenges you face as an urban educator? Please describe what you feel the causes of these challenges are.
3. How does your principal provide professional learning opportunities for you? Describe how they affect your effectiveness as an urban educator.
4. What does the teacher mentor program look like at your school? Elaborate on the learning process for teachers new to the profession, specifically the urban environment.
5. How does your principal celebrate diversity or provide opportunities for both teachers and students to express their cultural differences?
6. What influence does your principal have on your decision to remain teaching in the urban environment? Describe any leadership attributes they display or should display that have an effect on said decision.
7. All things considered, suppose you had 1 minute to discuss with your principal concerning his/her leadership practices, and how they have influenced your attitude and beliefs about teaching in the urban environment. What would you say and why?

## APPENDIX F

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE



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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

---

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT

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## INFORMED CONSENT

By signing below, participants understand that they will participate in a research study with Kelley J. Young, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development. The researcher is committed to supporting academic achievement for students in urban areas, and has dedicated many years of service in effort to improve the effectiveness of urban teachers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the retention practices/behaviors of urban elementary school principals.

This information will be obtained from urban teachers from 7 elementary schools in the Atlanta Public School System who agree to participate in a 15-20 minute survey. The design of the study may solicit your participation in further data collection via a small focus group. The survey will be administered at each of the 7 elementary campuses.

Risks involved in this study are minimal, and may include slight discomfort or sensitivity related to answering questions about your supervisor or principal.

Participants may benefit by contributing to the body of research regarding urban education, specifically urban teacher retention, and how it may or may not effect academic achievement in their professional arena.

The benefits to society are to include identified strategies and recommendations for urban teacher retention practices supported by empirical research, and ultimately improvement of academic achievement for urban students.

Time required from participants is approximately 2-3 minutes for brief introductory presentation by the researcher, and 15-20 minutes for survey completion.

Kelley Young will have primary access to data that is produces from the survey for the research study; however, advising committee members, or Institutional Review Board members Georgia Southern University may have access to make sure the researcher has followed regulatory requirements. To ensure that the collected research data is confidential and cannot be linked to specific subjects, the names of the participants shall not be written on the survey. All data will be held in the strictest

## APPENDIX F CONT'D

confidentiality by the researcher, will be stored in a secured lock box by for 3 years after the study in completed, and at this time all data will be destroyed.

Right to Ask Questions: Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843.

There is no compensation for participation in the study.

Participation in the study is voluntary, participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and withdrawal will not affect employment or benefits. Also, participants may choose not to answer any questions that will make them uncomfortable and no consequences will occur. Participation may be terminated due to not answering questions; however, there will not be any consequences in doing so.

Participants will not be penalized if they decide not to participate in the study.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H15076.

Title of Project: FIGHTING ON THE FRONTLINE: AN EXAMINATION OF TEACHER RETENTION PRACTICES IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Principal Investigator:

Kelley J. Young  
6269 Shenfield Lane  
Union City, GA 30291  
678-471-4849  
[kelleyyoung76@yahoo.com](mailto:kelleyyoung76@yahoo.com)

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Brenda Marina  
P.O. Box: 8131  
Georgia Southern University  
Statesboro, GA 30460  
912-478-5000  
[bmarina@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:bmarina@georgiasouthern.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX G

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE: FOCUS GROUP



DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT

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Researcher Name: Kelley Young, Ed.S.

**FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM: Adult Participation in a focus Group**

**What is the Research?**

You have been asked to take part in a research study about urban principals and teacher retention behaviors and practices.

The purpose of this study is to find out specific behaviors or practices utilized by urban principals that have an effect on urban teachers' decision to remain teaching in the urban school environment.

**Why have you been asked to take part?**

You teach in the urban environment at a high-needs school.

I would like you to take part in a discussion on how urban principals can implement leadership and professional behaviors which may influence your decision to remain in such a high-needs environment.

I will talk about your experiences as an urban teacher and your professional opinion about leadership behaviors in urban environments.

**Voluntary Participation**

This discussion is *voluntary*—you do not have to take part if you do not want to.

If you do not take part, it will have no effect on your employment status.

If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them.

You may leave the group at any time for any reason.

Focus groups will take place off school campus.

**Risks**

I do not think any risks are involved in taking part in this study.

**Benefits**

Participants will receive a \$10 gift card from a local restaurant.

## APPENDIX G CONT'D

**Privacy**

Your privacy will be protected.

Your name will not be used in any report that is published.

The discussion will be kept *strictly confidential*.

The other teachers in the group will be asked keep what we talk about private, but this cannot be assured.

Regulators, sponsors or Institutional Review Board Members that oversee research may see research records to make sure that the researchers have followed regulatory requirements

If the tape recorder is used, it will only be used to remind staff what teachers said.

All research data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and the tapes will be destroyed 3 years after the research has been completed.

**Audiotape Permission**

The discussion will be tape-recorded only if all participants agree, and the tape recorder can be turned off at any time during the focus group discussion.

I agree to be audio taped \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H15076.

**Questions**

You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions you wish regarding this evaluation. If you have any additional questions about the evaluation, you may call Kelley Young, 678-471-4849.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Georgia Southern University IRB Department at:

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Location: Suite 3000, Veazey Hall

Campus Mail: P.O. Box 8005

Phone: 912-478-5465

Fax: 912-478-0719

E-mail: [irb@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:irb@georgiasouthern.edu)

I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

*Please write your name below and check yes or no. If you want to take part Sign your name at the bottom.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
NAME

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to take part in the focus group.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I would not like to participate in the focus group.

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
PRIMARY RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE



APPENDIX H  
PRINCIPAL LETTER

November 1, 2014

Dear Principal,

I am currently an Instructional Coach and Ed.D. candidate at Georgia Southern University in the department of Educational Leadership. I have obtained approval from the Department of Evaluation and Research to conduct my study in the district to complete the requirements necessary to obtain my doctoral degree.

From the 83 elementary schools in the district, 7 have been chosen to participate in the study, and I am asking that you grant permission for me to conduct my study at your campus. Although you are not required to fill out any documentation, complete a survey, or participate in the focus groups, it is pertinent that I obtain your consent in effort to be respectful of your school's curriculum, program, and instructional time.

The purpose of my study is to ascertain urban elementary teachers' perspectives of teacher retention practices and behaviors exhibited by urban leaders. All data collected will be secured, and confidentiality is guaranteed. All participants will be invited to participate in a follow up focus group, and data obtained during these sessions will follow the same protocol.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, I am asking that you would allow me to work with your staff during a designated time in which I could introduce the study, obtain consent, facilitate the survey, and collect the results. I am anticipating this taking no approximately 25-40 minutes. This could be done preferably during a whole-group staff meeting, or in smaller grade level meetings.

I am acutely aware of how important this time is to your staff and am willing to provide them with light refreshments during the time allotted, and would greatly appreciate your participation in this study. If you have any further questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact me via email at [kelyoung@atlanta.k12.ga.us](mailto:kelyoung@atlanta.k12.ga.us) or [kellyjyoung76@yahoo.com](mailto:kellyjyoung76@yahoo.com), or by phone at 678.471.4849. Again, your support and participation is greatly appreciated, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Warmest Regards,  
Kelley J. Young  
Doctoral Candidate  
Georgia Southern University

APPENDIX I  
IRB APPROVAL

|   |                         |                      |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Georgia Southern University<br>Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs |                         |                      |
| <b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>   |                         |                      |
| Phone: 912-478-0843   |                         | Veazey Hall 2021     |
|   |                         | P.O. Box 8005        |
| Fax: 912-478-0719   | IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu | Statesboro, GA 30460 |

**To:** Kelley Young  
Dr. Brenda Marina

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Initial Approval Date:** 1/27/15

**Expiration Date:** 12/31/15


**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research –  
**Expedited Process or Full Board Process**

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H15076** and titled "**Fighting on the Frontline: An Examination of Teacher Retention Practices in Urban Elementary Schools**" it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of **220** subjects.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. – Description: The purpose of this study is to examine teacher retention practices implemented by urban school leaders.*

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol: you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer