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## The Principal's Roles in Creating and Maintaining Working Conditions in Schools in Georgia

Sandra Wallace Nethels

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THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLES IN CREATING AND MAINTAINING WORKING  
CONDITIONS IN SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA

by

SANDRA WALLACE NETHELS

(Under the Direction of Barbara Mallory)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools in Georgia. The researcher reviewed the literature related to the five major domains of teacher working conditions in schools. The five major domains were time; facilities and resources; teacher empowerment; leadership; and professional development.

The study was conducted to understand how the principal created and maintained conditions conducive to support teachers. The design of the study was a case study with multiple sites on the role of leadership in school working conditions. The researcher interviewed three principals, conducted three focus group interviews with teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools in Georgia. The researcher studied many documents, such as field notes from school improvement plans, minutes of various meetings held within each school, and from observations and school websites. Subsequently, the researcher answered the following overarching research question. What is the principal's role in creating and maintaining teacher working conditions?

From studying the major themes and patterns across all research questions, the researcher found that principals identified major working conditions that matter to teachers as instructional leadership, including being visible and protecting instructional time, teacher empowerment, and leadership that is student-centered and team-oriented. The researcher found that the principals play a major role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools. The researcher found that there were many forces perceived to be working against the role of the principal in maintaining positive working conditions within the schools.

Though the principal's role is a complex and demanding one, it is critical for principals to attract and retain a high quality faculty. The study reinforced previous research that teachers have high expectations of school leaders in maintaining a supportive environment through collaboration, caring, and encouraging teachers.

**INDEX WORDS:** Teacher working conditions, Principals, Time, Facilities and Resources, Teacher Empowerment, Leadership. Professional Development

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SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Homer Lee Wallace and Mary Carolyn Tanksley Wallace. They have always emphasized to me the importance of education. I am thankful that they were able to witness me achieve this accomplishment. I am forever thankful for the guidance and love they have shown me throughout my life. Whatever I have achieved is largely because of their continued encouragement for me to be the best that I could be.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my daughter Jasmine Jonishia Nethels. Jasmine was patient and never complained when our weekends were spent in the library. She is now a beautiful young lady attending her first year at Spelman College. My hope is that she will continue to understand that education is the key to unlocking many educational opportunities.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Educators are like Olympic torchbearers – moving through their schools day after day, keeping the flame of learning burning”. - McEwan (2003, p. 40)

#### **Introduction**

Principals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are held accountable to ensure that students are achieving, which has major implications for maintaining effective working conditions in schools. Principals are responsible for working conditions that facilitate the success of students, realizing that teachers make the most difference in student achievement (Yost, 2002). According to Minette, “the heart of education is the classroom teacher” (Knudsen, 2007, p. 41). In order for teachers to be successful in the classroom, they need working conditions that meet their expectations (Johnson, 2006). Principals are responsible for providing resources and support to teachers to assist them in improving instruction and increasing student achievement (Berry, Wade & Trantham, 2009; Yost, 2002; Prawat & Petersen, 1999; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond & Gundlach, 2003). Therefore, issues surrounding working conditions have become important to researchers studying the degree to which teachers’ levels of satisfaction impact the effectiveness of instruction and result in increased achievement (Berry, Wade & Trantham, 2009). According to Liberman and Miller (1999, p. 12), the complex relationship between student learning, teacher satisfaction with workplace conditions, and the principal’s role in maintaining effective school conditions cannot be ignored.

Knowing the status of working conditions can reveal areas where schools need to improve. Many studies have been conducted to identify components of working

conditions. From states that have conducted working conditions surveys, the major emphasis that teachers have identified fall within domains of time; facilities and resources; teacher empowerment; leadership; and professional development (Hirsch, Emerick, Church, Reeves & Fuller, 2007). “Teacher satisfaction reduces attrition, enhances collegiality, improves job performance, and has an impact on student outcomes” (Woods & Weasmer, 2002, p. 186). Knowing that working conditions and teacher satisfaction with working conditions are related to student outcomes makes it essential that principals focus on creating and maintaining systems of support in all of the domains. Therefore, understanding the role of the principal in improving working conditions is essential.

## **Background of Study**

### **Definition of Working Conditions**

Researchers (Hirsch & Emerick, 2007; Carlson, 2004; Perie & Baker, 1997; Johnson, 2006) have begun to identify exactly what constitutes working conditions. Working conditions can be defined as conditions in schools in the major areas of: time; facilities and resources; teacher empowerment; leadership and professional development (Hirsch & Emerick, 2007). Factors related to these five domains create a general climate of professional working conditions within a school setting. Teachers desire, for example, leadership from the school principal as one key factor of positive working conditions.

In order to understand working conditions, school districts are searching for research-based studies to determine exactly what elements best describe working conditions (Carlson, 2004; Perie & Baker, 1997; Johnson, 2006; Hirsh, 2004). In Carlson’s (2004) study, working conditions were viewed as administrative leadership and

support, school environment, teacher collaboration, work assignment, accountability, and work rewards. In Perie and Baker's (1997) analysis, they cite working conditions as administrative support, student behavior, decision making roles, parental support, amount of paperwork and routine duties, communication with principal, cooperation among the staff, staff recognition, control in classroom, influence over school policy, student absenteeism, student apathy and violence. Johnson (1990, 2006) and Horng (2009) found that no matter what the job setting for individuals, working conditions were the same. Her definition of workplace variables were as follows:

- Physical (safety & comfort, and space & resources)
- Organizational (authority, workload, autonomy, supervision, specialization, interdependence and interaction)
- Sociological (characteristics of clients & peers, and status & roles)
- Cultural (strength of culture & supportiveness of culture)
- Psychological (meaningfulness of work, learning & growth, and stress)
- Political (equity voice in governance)
- Economic (incentives & rewards, pay & benefits and job security) (p. 22)
- Educational ( curriculum and testing)
- Class Size
- Administrative Support
- Commute Time

All of these variables play a role in teacher satisfaction, which makes the principal's role in maintaining schools with effective working conditions a challenging one.



## **Domains of Working Conditions**

In several states, including Georgia, Arizona, Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Maine, Alabama, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Illinois and Virginia, teacher working conditions were studied to determine the relationship of working conditions to student achievement and to teacher attrition. In North Carolina, the Governor's Office served as the administrative body in leading a study designed to identify and track teachers' responses to working conditions over time. In 2003, teachers in all of the public schools were invited to respond to a questionnaire that provided the Governor's Office with the status of working conditions in five domains: time; facilities and resources; teacher empowerment; leadership; and professional development. Principal leadership was found to be one of the major factors influencing teacher working conditions (Hirsch et al. 2007). Parallel surveys conducted in other states also identified the importance of working conditions in teachers' level of performance and satisfaction with principal leadership and their jobs (Hirsch et al. 2007; Hirsch, 2005; Tenenbaum, 2004).

Research indicates that working conditions can factor into teacher effectiveness in student achievement (Johnson, 2006). Working conditions are important as a retention factor as well; if teachers are satisfied with the conditions at their school, they will remain in the school (Berry, 2004). Teachers satisfied with working conditions also concentrate on doing their best job of providing students with high quality teaching, which leads to students being successful in the testing environment (Berry, 2004).

**Time.**

Wade (2001) recognized time as one important domain of working conditions in schools. Paperwork can consume a lot of teaching time. Because of the emphasis on accountability, teachers need time for planning for quality teaching. They also need time to properly communicate with parents. Gunter, Rayner, Thomas, Fielding, Butt and Lance (2005) report in their study that reduction in workload can enhance job satisfaction. Teachers appreciate conditions that maximize the time needed to do their jobs.

**Facilities and Resources.**

A second major domain of working conditions involves facilities and resources. Teachers need the proper classroom supplies to assist student success. Adequate resources are important to quality teaching (Johnson, 2006). Facilities are also important for student achievement. Schneider (2003) found that the conditions of a school affect teaching and learning.

**Teacher Empowerment.**

Another domain of teacher working conditions is teacher empowerment. Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2004) advocates teacher empowerment for school renewal. "Empowering others to make significant decisions is a key goal for leaders when accountability mechanisms include giving a greater voice to community stakeholders" (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 12). As teachers account for considerable influence on student achievement, they expect collaboration. It was determined that through interviews with new teachers in Massachusetts, teachers were not only willing to collaborate with their colleagues, but they were expected to do

so (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman & Liu, 2001). Teachers generally work in isolation in classrooms, but collaboration with colleagues and roles in decision making are important. Ingersoll (2004) found that “Schools that delegated more control to teachers had fewer problems among teachers and less conflict between teachers and administrators” (p. 202). This was particularly true when teachers were involved in school wide discipline and tracking decisions.

### **Leadership.**

One of the major areas of working conditions, leadership of the principal, can make a difference in teacher productivity. If teachers are working in an environment that is intimidating to them, they will at first work hard to satisfy the principal out of fear of losing their job (Wendel, Hoke & Joekel, 1996). However, teachers’ fear can turn into resistant behavior and teachers’ “productivity would decrease, quality of work would drop, errors would creep into the systems, morale would sag, and employees might leave the organization” (Wendel, Hoke & Joekel, 1996, p.87). The attitude that the leader portrays will have a great effect on the attitude of faculty and staff (Praisner, 2003).

In similar context, Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission of the Virginia General Assembly (JLARC) (2004) examined the best practices that attributed to successful school achievement among challenging situations. From the study, JLARC learned that schools that have achieved academic success, despite the challenges, have principals who have consistently used strategies that enhance student achievement. Among the strategies, JLARC found that principals provided a safe and secure school climate. The study also found that the principals supported collaboration among the staff and provided the necessary time for collaboration to occur. Barkley, Bottoms, Feagin

and Clark (2004) found that principal leadership strategies need to convey to teachers, and students, that he or she fully supports the hard work and effort required from all to reach the goal. Principal leadership, or administrative support, was viewed as a necessary working condition across many studies, mainly in demonstrative acts of teacher support (Mallak, 1998).

### **Professional Development.**

Another domain of working conditions, professional development, has been identified as critical to teachers' satisfaction. Teachers desired professional development opportunities that have the potential to impact teacher learning and student achievement (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Quality professional development provides avenues for teachers to be "reflective practitioners, decision makers, problem solvers and researchers" (Yost, 2002, p. 195). Danielson (2002) reports that reflective decision making is one of the most important ingredients to teachers doing their best in the classroom. Professional development for teachers that is short term, driven by an external agenda, and disconnected from classroom practice is not what teachers want. Professional development that is school-based and focused on a teacher's needs and student learning goals has much more potential for teacher satisfaction. Time and resources used more often to support teachers' instructional needs within their classroom provide teachers meaningful professional learning.

Another aspect of professional development was teacher involvement with an induction and mentoring process. For new teachers, induction provides a great sense of belonging (Danielson, 2002). Novice teachers need the support of a veteran teacher to

keep their excitement for teaching, which they could lose if they are left to work in isolation without collaborative professional learning opportunities (Danielson, 2002).

Veteran teachers chosen to mentor novice teachers feel a sense of pride that they were thought of as someone who had the teaching skills that would benefit someone else. This will lead to heightened self-efficacy for both veteran and novice teachers (Yost, 2002).

### **Principal's Role in Maintaining Working Conditions**

Many studies have been conducted on teacher working conditions (Johnson, 2006). Major findings identify that working conditions can make a difference in retaining teachers and student achievement. In discussing the school as a workplace, the principal plays a major role as part of the organizational context. The principal generally holds formal authority in the school, supervises the work of teachers, and serves as the key facilitator between the teachers and the district office. North Carolina studies on workplace conditions found that principals achieve varying degrees of success in that role (Hirsch, Emerick, Church, Reeves & Fuller, 2007). The principal can set a positive tone for adult interactions and make collaboration possible by creating a schedule that allows teachers to work with those who teach the same students or subject (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). The principal can endorse partnerships with local community agencies that provide school support services (Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003). The principal can ensure that the district maintains the school facility and provides teachers sufficient instructional resources (Johnson 1990). The principal can arrange for professional workshops and inform teachers about opportunities for teacher learning and differentiated roles (Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003). The principal can support teachers by

working collaboratively with staff and students to develop norms for acceptable behavior and a system of discipline to reinforce those norms (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001).

Many teachers look to their principals to create conditions of working that provide for their individual needs. However, given the many demands on a principal's time, this is, at times, unrealistic. Aware of the importance of new teachers receiving support from their colleagues, a skillful school leader engages both experienced and novice teachers in productive work experiences, thus increasing the interdependence of all teachers and the coherence of the work they do together (Johnson et al. 2004). Although researchers have identified what principals can do to affect working conditions, research is less clear in understanding how principals think about and provide for working conditions that are conducive to high expectations of teaching and learning.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Because stakeholders continue to monitor and criticize the educational system in the United States, the government continues to revise and implement new policies to improve the academic achievement of all students. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many states have looked to the working conditions of teachers as a way to address school improvement. From many studies, policy makers and school leaders have learned a great deal about teacher working conditions, especially as they relate to positive school environment and student achievement. Principals, generally perceived to be formal leaders of the schools, are expected to know and practice proper strategies that can help all students reach adequate yearly progress. The principal is the catalyst to set the climate for a supportive learning environment for all students to raise their achievement levels (Mallak, 1998; Dove, 2004). In the age of school reform and accountability, the leader is expected to

provide a workplace that is supportive for novice teachers and veteran teachers, because teachers make the most difference in student achievement (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Principals need to retain effective teachers by leading the way in providing working conditions that will attract a strong faculty.

Working conditions are very important for teachers to be effective. Working conditions are also related to retaining quality teachers. Researchers have generally grouped working conditions that matter to teachers in five domains: time; facilities and resources; teacher empowerment; leadership; professional development. The efficient use of time provides teachers with opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues and devote time to curriculum that will enhance student achievement. Facilities and resources are also important. Student achievement improves when teachers believe they have a secure environment. Results of the research also reveal student achievement improves when teachers feel they have the support of their principals, which includes adequate resources and involvement in the decision making process, which is generally viewed as empowerment.

Teacher empowerment is essential in the working environment. Teachers need to know that their input is valued and important. Leadership is required to ensure that teachers feel that they are a part of the school team, especially when decisions about curriculum and teaching and learning are involved. They have the expertise and expectations to make the difference in student learning, and their voices are critical in decisions that affect the teaching learning process.

As a working condition, professional development is valuable to teachers when they are involved in deciding what strategies they need that will lead to increased student

achievement. Induction and mentoring provides novice teachers support. Veteran teachers have a wealth of information and knowledge that they can share with the “new kid on the block.” Although professional development has a challenging place in working conditions, due to top-down initiatives and budget constraints, teachers value the principal who understands and provides for their individual needs in professional learning.

After reading the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys and findings, followed by similar studies in other states, this researcher’s attention is specifically drawn to data that report teachers’ views on working conditions. Although the research has established that teachers, students, and principals benefit from a workplace that is conducive to a positive learning environment (Berry, Wade & Trantham, 2009), the researcher, after a review of the literature, has not found many studies on how principals assess and address working conditions within their schools. The principal has a challenging and complex role as school leader. Many studies have accounted for teachers’ views on working conditions. Knowing the domains of working conditions and knowing the difference that effective conditions can play in retaining quality teachers, cannot explain or account for how principals are addressing working conditions in the five domains. How do they create time, provide resources, empower teachers, and maintain professional learning opportunities? How do they view these domains as critical to maintaining an effective teaching faculty? As the researcher found the literature less saturated with views of principals concerning working conditions, the purpose of this study is to understand the principal’s role in maintaining working conditions in schools in Southeast Georgia.



## **Research Questions**

**The researcher will respond to the overarching question: What is the principal's role in creating and maintaining teacher working conditions? To do so, the following sub questions will guide the study:**

1. How do principals identify working conditions?
2. How do principals identify their roles in addressing teacher working conditions in Georgia?
3. What are compelling and constraining forces that the principal faces in improving working conditions?

## **Significance of the Study**

The results of this study may be important to the larger body of research that continues to seek strategies to improve the process of instruction, understand principal leadership, retain teachers, and increase student achievement. The findings of this study may contribute to a deeper understanding of how principals are working to maintain working conditions that have been identified as critical for teacher satisfaction. While several states in the southeastern United States have conducted studies on teacher working conditions, more insight is needed into the problems principals face in supporting the conditions.

The results of this study may provide insight into the practice of principals in their attempts to address issues related to teachers' perceptions of working conditions. Although much of the literature supports the significance of improving working conditions, it is not as focused on how principals respond to teacher working conditions conducive to teaching and learning within the school. Therefore, this study will

contribute to an understanding of the practice of principals as it provides insight into how principals assess and address working conditions in their schools.

Local school districts may reflect on the findings of this study to determine how to address teacher working conditions. The study may provide superintendents additional insight into how principals could address the added responsibility of working conditions to their current responsibilities as instructional leaders. This study may also provide insight into how principals can better understand teachers' needs for improved working conditions or appreciation for conditions that are conducive to their work. The results of the study will be important to the researcher because of a recent career change.

Several years ago, the researcher assumed an assistant principal position with one of the responsibilities being teacher supervision. The school's leadership team, in an effort to answer greater levels of accountability, is focused on increasing student achievement and ensuring teacher satisfaction. The results of this study may provide information to the researcher's leadership team and district level administration regarding how to build systems within the school to maintain effective working conditions. The study will provide insight into the responsibilities of the principal, and especially for assistant principals who aspire to become principals. The results of this study may add to the existing body of knowledge regarding principals' perceptions of their roles in maintaining working conditions. The researcher will be better equipped to practice what is research-based in providing needed teacher support.

### **Research Procedures**

In designing the study, the researcher chose to use a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative research design is a method that reflects the "routine and

problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5). Using case study, the researcher interviewed principals to explore their views and roles as they relate to maintaining teacher working conditions. The researcher also conducted a document analysis in order to understand school procedures and policies referred to by principals during the interviews. Documents included current documents, school websites, and observations.

The researcher selected three Georgia principals from Jet District (a pseudonym) to interview. The principals came from traditional elementary, middle and high schools. The principals had two or more years of experience within the school where they were currently employed. Pseudonyms identified principals to maintain their anonymity.

The interviews were semi-structured with guided questions and lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The researcher scheduled appointments to accommodate each interviewee's schedule. Prior to the start of the interviews, consent forms were given to each principal interviewee. The participants were assured that they would not be identified in the study, and the tapes would be destroyed at the completion of the study.

Teacher focus group interviews would also be used to collect data. Three teachers were identified from each of the respective schools. The focus groups responded to topics provided by the researcher.

In order to determine validity and precision of the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study was created to gather feedback from the principal and teacher respondents to assist in the modification of the interview questions. Based on the findings from the pilot, adjustments were made to the interview questions to allow the researcher to collect sufficient data to answer the research questions of the study.

Once data had been collected, the researcher analyzed data through the lens of the common domains of working conditions found in the literature. As a framework for this current study, these areas were found to determine the link between teacher working conditions, job satisfaction and student achievement. The researcher reduced the information in the transcripts by coding descriptive terms and phrases under the specified domain. These phrases were used to describe the participant's perspectives of each domain.

In an attempt to conceptualize the perspectives of the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions, the researcher grouped recurring terms, common phrases, and identified common events to identify themes that emerged from the data (Cortazzi, 2001). These themes developed common codes in each interview transcript.

Documents were collected from each school that provide insight into the five domains of working conditions: time (master schedules), facilities and resources (school improvement plan and observations), teacher empowerment (department chairs), leadership (leadership team meetings), and professional development (staff development planned meetings). The documents were analyzed and information gained to determine how the principals maintain teacher working conditions in schools in Georgia.

### **Definition of Terms**

Working conditions are those conditions within a school that impact satisfaction of teachers as they engage in their work.

Lead teacher (now known as instructional supervisor) role is to provide leadership in the development, revision, implementation, and evaluation of the school curriculum.

Targeted Assisted Title One School is one that receives funds that are for providing services to a select group of children. The students who receive these services have been identified as failing or most at risk of failing to meet the States challenging content and student performance standards.

### **Delimitation**

1. The study focuses on three principals in one school district in Georgia. The findings will not be generalizable to the larger principal population, but they will provide insight into how some principals create and maintain working conditions, which will contribute to an understanding of the practice of leadership.

### **Limitation**

1. The Georgia teachers and administrators are experiencing mandated furloughs during the year that this study was conducted. It is unclear as to how furloughs may affect teacher working conditions.

### **Summary**

There is research that supports that teacher working conditions are a factor as to whether they remain in the teaching profession or transfer to another school. It is also noted that student achievement is linked to teacher satisfaction. Therefore, due to the extreme focus on students achieving, schools need to examine all areas of what is occurring in their schools to ensure that all students are receiving what they need to succeed.

Principals play a pivotal role in creating and maintaining working conditions. The common domains of working conditions include time, facilities and resources, leadership,

empowerment and professional development. The principal is critical in each of these domains, and while working conditions have been identified, the literature is less clear on how principals are addressing working conditions in their schools.

This study will note that research shows the connection working conditions has to student achievement and to teacher attrition. Teacher satisfaction with their workplace conditions can provide a win-win situation for both teachers and principals. No Child Left Behind has created an enormous amount of accountability for student achievement. Therefore, it is critical that principals determine what is needed to provide an environment supportive for teacher and student success.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter was to report the review of extant literature and empirical research focused on working conditions in schools and the principal's role in creating effective working conditions. First, the researcher defined working conditions, and reviewed the literature of the five major domains of working conditions in schools. The second major component of the review of literature was to report the major benefits of positive working conditions, including effects on student achievement, teacher retention, job satisfaction, and teacher recruitment. Finally, the third major area was a synthesis of what is known concerning the principal's role in providing working conditions related to school effectiveness. The chapter ends with a summary of the literature review.

#### **Overview of Working Conditions**

Working conditions in schools contribute to a successful learning environment for teachers and students. School working conditions can be defined as the characteristics of the workplace, including use of time, facilities, resources, administrative support, conditions for professional growth, etc. Many of the characteristics of workplace conditions vary across the literature. For example, Dove (2004) has included class size as a working condition, while others have not. Johnson (1990) includes characteristics of students, such as the socio-economic status of students, as a workplace condition, while others have not.

Teachers describe working conditions in terms of relationships with colleagues, illustrating it is clear there are many components to consider in describing working conditions in schools. One of the reasons that working conditions in schools warranted investigation in recent years is the link to teacher retention. The emphasis on improving conditions in which teachers work began to receive much attention in research, mainly due to the need to retain quality teachers.

Workplace conditions have been identified as a powerful determinant of where teachers choose to work (Horng, 2005). In Horng's study, poor workplace conditions were disincentives to those qualified to teach. Working conditions were more important to keeping good teachers than any other factors, including student characteristics and salary. In 2007, North Carolina was involved in the third iteration of a working conditions survey because the policy makers believed teacher working conditions were student learning conditions (Hirsch et al. 2007). They encouraged schools to use the findings of the statewide survey to begin conversations about how to improve teacher working conditions in order to improve student achievement and reduce teacher turnover rates.

Working conditions had also become very important to researchers in studying teacher satisfaction related to student achievement. Teacher job satisfaction has been linked to student achievement because satisfaction could provide them with the incentive to do a better job in the classroom (Johnson, 2006). "What makes the move to transforming schooling and teaching different from other change efforts is the basic understanding that it is necessary to create conditions for teachers to accomplish these



new goals. The strong connection between students' learning and teachers' workplace conditions cannot be ignored" (Lieberman & Miller, 1999, p. 12).

### **Domains of Working Conditions in Schools**

In the literature, working conditions have been identified different ways with many domains. Johnson (1990, 2006) and Horng (2009) found that no matter what the job setting for individuals, workplace variables can be described in terms of:

- Physical (safety & comfort, space & resources, and school facilities)
- Organizational (authority, workload, autonomy, supervision, specialization, interdependence and interaction)
- Sociological (characteristics of clients & peers, and status & roles)
- Cultural (strength of culture & supportiveness of culture)
- Psychological (meaningfulness of work, learning & growth, and stress)
- Political (equity voice in governance)
- Economic (incentives & rewards, pay & benefits and job security)
- Educational ( curriculum and testing)
- Class size
- Administrative Support
- Commute Time

In Carlson's (2004) study, working conditions were viewed as administrative leadership and support, school environment, teacher collaboration, work assignment, accountability, and work rewards. In Perie and Baker's (1997) analysis, they cited working conditions as administrative support, student behavior, decision making roles, parental support, amount of paperwork and routine duties , communication with

principal, cooperation among the staff, staff recognition, control in classroom, influence over school policy, student absenteeism, student apathy and violence.

North Carolina has been a leading state in studying the impact teacher working conditions have in relation to student achievement and teacher job satisfaction. Through concern from the North Carolina Office of the Governor in 2004, a survey was developed and questions were answered by teachers and administrators to determine what was needed to ensure that teachers remained in their job positions. Kansas and South Carolina are among the states that have used the North Carolina survey or variations of the survey to gather information on how to serve the teachers better in their districts to prevent losing them. One of the key features of the questionnaire was the identification of working conditions by domain. North Carolina identified five key areas, or domains, of working conditions, based on the known factors in the literature. These five domains were time, facilities and resources, teacher empowerment, leadership and professional development.

### **Time.**

Even though schools generally require students and teachers to attend five days a week, the structure of the day requires homework and preparation work for teachers. Teachers have responsibilities that require time outside the school day, such as parent conferences, assessing and grading student work, and other school-related activities. Time was noted as a major domain in the first North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey in 2004 (Hirsch, 2004).

It has been noted in the research, teachers have been very vocal about not having enough time to do their jobs, even though they have planning time during the school day

(Wade, 2001). Lortie (1975) found that “time is the single most important general resource teachers possess in their quest for productivity and psychic rewards; ineffective allocations of time are costly” (p. 177). Many view teacher time as substantially resilient (LeBlanc, 1994). “Virtually every job has time parameters, except teaching” (LeBlanc, 1994, p. 12). Teaching requires time outside the designated school day, and the quality of the job within the school day is often dependent on the time spent outside the classroom.

Some studies have been conducted to examine how teachers use time. Meek (2003) performed a case study on her third grade class. She divided the daily jobs of a teacher into two main groups. The first group was academic instruction and the second group was social services (assemblies, morning announcements, etc...). At the end of the school term, she found that thirty percent of class time was spent on non-academic events. In order to validate her study, Meek found a report by NCES that studied 53,008 teachers in three different school years. The findings reflected similar results, such as sixty-eight percent of the teaching time was spent on classroom instruction and thirty-two percent of time spent on her definition of social services. Meek determined that “In reality, there is not enough classroom time to shoulder the academic, social services, and the assessment mission that the public schools have accumulated” (p. 595).

LeBlanc (1994) found that “teachers work 55 hours or more a week during the school year or 2,200 hours a year, which is 31% above the base norm. This does not include extra-curricular activities, which are usually voluntary contributions to the student development. “Teachers are not the only ones in society working more than 1,680 hours per year. Most others, however, are remunerated or recognized in some fashion for the extra work” (LeBlanc, p.13). LeBlanc continues to explain that there is considerable

confusion about teachers' work. Some people sincerely believe that they work from 8:30 to 3:30 for 10 months a year with professional days and exam days as insidious forms of paid recreation. Even the more informed, including trustees and various former teachers who moved "up," do not seem to realize how encompassing the teachers' load has become. In addition to the planning, teaching, marking, disciplining, supervision, meetings, administrivia, and keeping up with new programs developments, which has always been part of teaching, new demands, are added every year (p. 13). Firestone and Bader (1991) concur with the notion that teachers work many hours that are not built into the school day. "Like most problems in society the issue of teacher time is first of all a lack of communication....Administrators are usually trying to meet the needs of some individual or group when they ask teachers to assume another responsibility" (LeBlanc, 1994, p. 14).

Hill (2004) studied time, as a factor of working conditions to learn that time was one factor influenced by administrative support and empowerment. In another study, Mohapatra (2005) found that time was a factor in teacher decisions to remain at a school. In her quantitative study, 292 teachers responded to the School Characteristics Survey for High School Teachers. Mohapatra found that 10.2% of teachers who did not return to their schools for a following school year did not like being assigned duties other than their teaching assignment.

In the 2006 Kansas working conditions survey, researchers found that time is essential to student achievement. The study revealed that non-instructional time, non-essential duties assigned, and interruptions and paperwork were of major concerns to teachers (Hirsch, Emerick, Church, Reeves & Fuller, 2006). Time and teacher

empowerment were noted from the survey as being most important to student learning. In the South Carolina study, Hirsch (2005) reflected that teachers were not satisfied with the time that was allowed for teachers to perform their jobs. In North Carolina, Hirsch (2004) also found that time was the one working condition that caused frustration across all school levels, including elementary, middle, and high schools. The time domain had the highest level of dissatisfaction, as teachers reported not enough time to work with mentors, not enough time to collaborate with other teachers, and not enough time to plan for instruction. In 2006, teachers in North Carolina were continuing to report time as a factor of continued struggle within their schools.

Georgia 2005 and 2006 studies on time reveal that much time is spent outside of the school day grading papers, planning, etc .This was also discovered in Arizona 2006 and 2007, South Carolina 2004, Nevada 2006 and other states who participated in statewide surveys on teacher working conditions. High response rates were noted above 50% in Virginia 2008, Mississippi 2008 and Kansas 2006/2008 in relation to teachers having reasonable class sizes, allowing them to meet the needs of all students.

### **Facilities and Resources.**

In the wealthiest country in the world, it is difficult to imagine that teachers work in poor conditions and without adequate resources. Yet, in many studies, researchers have noted that not all teachers report having clean and safe facilities in which to work, nor do they have adequate resources to do their jobs, leaving many teachers to purchase instructional materials out of their personal funds. The working condition domain of facilities and resources was studied in many state initiatives to identify factors that contribute to teacher satisfaction.

While it is generally believed that teachers are provided adequate school facilities and resources, surveys have yielded findings that may be surprising, even to principals. In North Carolina (Hirsch, 2004), the state survey revealed that principals believed facilities and resources were the least important facet of working conditions, whereas 20% of the teachers reported having adequate facilities and resources as the most important facet of their working conditions. In 2004, 69 % of the teachers in North Carolina agreed that they had adequate instructional supplies to do their job, but it was alarming to find that 31% did not have adequate resources. Two years later, in the 2006, iteration of the North Carolina working conditions survey, 73% of the teachers believed they had adequate resources, which indicated that principals and policy makers were attempting to address the issue.

In 2005 and 2006, studies were conducted in Georgia on working conditions to determine teacher perceptions of their schools and resources. Facilities and resources ranked first or second as significant factors to facilitate student learning. In the qualitative component of the studies, researchers heard teachers explain how they have limited numbers of textbooks, inadequate science labs, and modular classrooms ill equipped, often due to rapid population growth (BORUSG, 2005; BORUSG 2006).

In Arizona (CTQ, 2006), teachers were generally positive about their facilities and resources. They found that 83% of the educators who responded to the statewide survey reported working in school facilities that were safe. However, only 62% reported having adequate access to instructional technology. Only 64% reported having access to adequate instructional materials and adequate access to copy machines, paper, and chalk, which are considered basic instructional supplies.

It is believed that student achievement will soar in a school environment that has classrooms and other areas that are up to standards (Stricherz, 2000). “Research does show that student achievement lags in shabby school buildings- those with no science labs, inadequate ventilation, and faulty heating systems” (Stricherz, 2000, p. 30). Morris (2003) found that deficient lighting and poor plumbing are also factors that negatively affect teaching and learning. It has also been noted that acoustics are important for academic achievement and performance (Crandell & Smaldino, 2000; Schneider, 2002).

“ Beyond the direct effects that poor facilities have on students’ ability to learn, the combination of poor facilities, which create an uncomfortable and uninviting workplace for teachers, combined with frustrating behavior by students including poor concentration and hyperactivity, lethargy, or apathy, creates a stressful set of working conditions for teachers” (Morris, 2003, p. 3). Schneider’s (2003) study with Chicago and Washington D.C. teachers revealed that:

School facilities have a direct affect on teaching and learning. Poor school conditions make it more difficult for teachers to deliver an adequate education to their students, adversely affect teachers’ health and increase the likelihood that teachers will leave their school and the teaching profession. Our nation’s school facilities are a critical part of the educational process. Their condition and upkeep must be addressed in the ongoing discourse about student achievement, teacher effectiveness and accountability (p. 4).

Castaldi (1994) reported, “Excellent school facilities and dedicated teachers are the basic ingredient of a good educational program” (p. 3).

The building of schools is controlled by politics (Maniloff, 2004). Stevenson (2006) points out that the “playing field is not level” if one school’s physical environment is pleasant and the other school’s physical environment, as well as other factors that increase student achievement are not compatible. “In the interest of fairness, as well as in the interest of assuring that all children have an opportunity to learn to their fullest, poor school facilities across this country need to be brought up to standard” (Stevenson, 2006, p. 14). He feels that policymakers should determine how this could be done in all communities, regardless of the economic status.

### **Teacher Empowerment.**

Teacher empowerment has been identified as an important domain of working conditions in schools. “Empowerment is the process that encourages teachers to help the school achieve its primary goal of improving the learning opportunities of its students” (Short & Greer, 2002, p. 16). It is believed that the change of allowing teachers to share power with principals is a win- win situation for our schools and student achievement (Blasé & Blasé, 1994; Blasé & Blasé, 2001). Shared decision making is also tied to student achievement because those involved have an important connection to the decisions made (Crump, 1999; Leithwood, 2004). “Teacher involvement is a means of avoiding feelings of powerlessness and workplace alienation, both of which can lead to success and burnout” (Leithwood, 2004, p. 54).

“The construct of teacher empowerment has been proposed as an element of professionalism, as it refers to increases in teacher decision-making authority and accountability at the school level” (Sykes, 1999, p. 238). According to Mohapatra (2005) teacher empowerment, professionalism, school-based management, and shared decision



making became very important to school reform in the 1980's. Blasé and Blasé (1994) report that reorganization of schools to accommodate teacher empowerment continued to be a focus in the 1990's. "Behaviors such as articulating a vision, providing teacher recognition, being visible, being decisive, supporting shared decision making, and demonstrating trust were identified with empowering leadership" (Blasé & Blasé, 1994).

Trust is important to school improvement (Blasé & Blasé, 2001). Teachers are empowered when principals trust them to mentor other teachers. (Boreen, Niday, & Johnson, 2004). "As an educator and decision maker in the classroom, a teacher needs to continuously acquire and improve upon skills to learn and solve problems, develop educational programs, and implement changes" (Hung, 2005, p. 6). Ingersoll (2002) found in his analysis that teachers who are involved in school policies related to student behavior and other issues of importance in their schools are less likely to leave the school due to job dissatisfaction. In the Hirsch 2004 report of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, the domain of empowerment was assessed to determine how schools were performing in this area. It was found that seventy eight percent of the teachers believed that they were trusted with making decisions about student instruction and progress. In addition, eighty-one percent felt they worked together to improve teaching and learning. In the study, sixty-six percent agree there is a high level of trust and mutual respect at their schools. Sixty-two percent of teachers felt comfort in raising issues and concerns that are important to them. The belief that empowerment is distributed among teachers, parents and community members was at the eighty-three percent level. In the North Carolina 2006 study, Hirsch, Emerick, Church and Fuller (2006) reported similar findings to the 2004 study.

They considered empowerment to be the single most significant domain for the academic success of their students. The North Carolina (2006) teachers report being more involved in decisions related to their own teaching than the whole school, this was reported by other states as well, including Nevada (2006). Reports from studies reveal that when teachers are limited with their contribution to the school it gives them a feeling of not being involved or trusted.

### **Leadership.**

Researchers have noted leadership as a key component to teacher working conditions. The principal's leadership role is very important to school improvement (Richardson, 2000; Kelley, Thornton & Daugherty, 2005). Blank (2001) reports the principal leadership responsibilities include staff development, providing planning time for staff and being an instructional leader. Thoughts from the educational community have led to the realization that leadership in our schools is an important ingredient for positive or negative results in our schools (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). In addition, there is no single recipe for leading a school (Portin, Schneider, DeArond & Gundlach, 2003, p. 45), but principals are generally held accountable for providing adequate working conditions for teachers.

Various studies point out that a principal with strong instructional leadership is a defining quality of effective schools (Waters, et al, 2003.) The charismatic leaders may shine for a moment, but once the glitter is gone schools need leaders who can provide continuous improvements (Kelley, Thornton & Daugherty, 2005). The culture of a school is very important to school reform. Shared cultures and vision will keep unity in any group of individuals (Bolman & Deal, 1991). In order for the school leader to promote

culture of any kind, the leader must have a clear understanding of how important all individuals are to the school. The leader should respect the differences among the staff, parents and students (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000, Harris & Lowery, 2002).

“Studies on school effectiveness, school climate, and student achievement all reveal one commonality, the fact that good happenings in schools depend to a great extent on the quality of school leadership” (Norton, 2002). Principals were seen as effective communicators with the teachers and provided them with helpful ideas for classroom instruction (Huang, 2000). Principals can provide a positive working condition by showing the teachers that they are concerned about their ideas, and giving the teachers positive feedback of how to improve classroom practices (Carlson, 2004).

Many working condition studies include leadership as a domain that has the potential to influence teacher satisfaction. Hill (2004) conducted a study to determine the extent to which working conditions influenced teachers’ decisions to remain in their teaching positions and to examine teachers’ perceptions of the amount of control their principal had over their working conditions.

Looking at the reflection of teachers in seven of the nine case studies, Hill (2004) found that leadership was an important domain. In addition, seven of the nine focus groups recognized leadership as one of the most important of the working condition domains. Elementary and middle school teachers viewed the principals as having the majority of the control. However, high school respondents viewed the leadership domain as one in which the principal had the least control.

Results from a study conducted in 2005 revealed seven out of 10 Georgia districts ranked leadership as the highest or second highest domain. Georgia educators reported in

the 2005 qualitative study that ineffective leadership could lower morale and influence teacher attrition. The 2006 quantitative study continued to support their concerns that leadership is a strong predictor of educators staying or leaving their schools.

Arizona 2007 survey reports differences in opinion about enforcement of rules. The differences are strongest between elementary and secondary educators, with only 48 percent of middle school educators and 43 percent of high school educators expressing positive impressions of leadership in this area, as compared to 63 percent of elementary educators. It was also noted in the Arizona 2007 study that principal perceptions of leadership are different, and these differences between leadership and faculty may be an important influence on overall teacher perceptions of their working conditions.

### **Professional Development.**

Professional development has been noted as important to give teachers avenues to incorporate successful ideas that can improve student achievement. “A school’s characteristics have often been defined, in part by the provision of ongoing in-service activities and professional development opportunities available for teachers” (Mohapatra, 2005, p. 45). “Providing opportunities to improve skills used to teach children has become the essence of professional development” (Mohapatra, 2005, p. 44).

Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon (2001) point out that much literature reflects that duration is best for professional development. Duration of professional development activities is best because it provides teachers an extended amount of time for discussion of strategies and concepts that will benefit student learning. Duration of professional development also provides teachers with the opportunity to introduce new techniques in the classroom and get the feedback that will be helpful for teachers to

reflect on what works and what needs to be refined. Garet et al (2001) found that schools and districts need to focus on providing high-quality professional development experiences for teachers that will provide research-based skills and strategies that will improve teaching.

According to Ma (2001), professional development is important for a teacher to feel professional competence in his/her job. Mayer, Mullens, and Moore (2001) support that professional development is an important school characteristic that is present in schools that show high student success. Yost (2002) also describes how professional development contributes to teacher development.

Because good teaching is central to student achievement, schools must examine their professional development practices to determine whether they meet the needs of individual educators or whether professional development is offered as “one size fits all.” Activities that encourage teachers at every career stage to be reflective practitioners, decision makers, problem solvers, and researchers are vital professional development (Yost, 2002, p. 195).

Professional learning has often been viewed as problematic in education because many teachers are required to attend professional development sessions that are not designed for them individually. In the Hill (2004) study, professional development received the least favorable rating in the focus group. Elementary, middle and high school teachers rated the domain fifth among the other domains. Principal influence related to professional development was not rated high on the survey by any of the schools. Elementary and high schools both placed it third and middle school placed it fourth.

In Clark County, Nevada (2006), teachers indicated they needed more support to effectively teach special education students (52 percent) close the achievement gap (45 percent) support in working with Limited English Proficient students (28 percent) gifted and talented students (23 percent). Parallel to that study Arizona 2006 reports that they also need more support in teaching special education students, English language learners and closing the achievement gap. Kansas educators agreed that sufficient resources are available to allow teachers to take advantage of professional development activities was 59.0% in 2006 and 68.8% in 2008. It was noted in Mississippi 2008 study that principals have a different opinion when it comes to professional development. Principals agreed at 90% that professional development provided teachers with the knowledge and skills most needed to teach effectively whereas teachers only agreed at 61%.

Also under the umbrella of professional development is mentoring. Mentoring and induction programs are a vital component to supporting our novice teachers. Induction programs vary from school districts. However, the main distinction that should be common among all programs is mentors should provide novice teachers with effective classroom management procedures, routines, and guidance to sound academic practices (Wong, 2002).

New teachers are reported to be leaving the profession within 3-5 years. Weiss (1999) reveals that “new teachers are exceptionally vulnerable to the effects of unsupportive workplace conditions; precisely because of never having taught before, they lack the resources and tools to deal with the frustrations of the workplace” (p. 869). Novice teachers need to have a mentor to guide them through the difficult times (Church, 2005; Ingersoll, 2002). Many leave because they are not satisfied with working

conditions. Carlson (2004) found that literature reflects that teachers' level of satisfaction is enhanced by exchanges with colleagues.

“Beginning teachers benefit from external factors in the form of support groups, mentoring and other collegial interaction” (Woods & Weamsmer, 2002 p. 188).

If today's new teachers find that their workplaces fail them, chances are good that they will transfer to other schools or leave the profession altogether, thus further jeopardizing the stability of public education, the well-being of students and the future of society. If students are to be effectively educated so that they can perform to high standards, schools must become places where teachers and students can succeed together (Johnson, 2006, p. 19).

Yost (2002) did a study in a University in the Midwest dealing with a mentor program. In the study, there were four veteran educators with teaching experience ranging from eight to seventeen years, and the novice was a first year teacher. The new teacher taught in the mentor's class for an entire school year. Both mentor and mentee achieved learning. The mentor gained a newfound respect of how important teaching practices are to student success. This experience also provided the mentor with a higher self-worth as a valued educator.

Induction programs have shown great results for keeping novice teachers interested in the teaching profession. Directed by Susie Heintz in the Flowing Wells School District Tucson, Arizona, the induction program (a five year process) begins before school starts. She progresses each year from novice, advanced beginner, competent teacher, proficient teacher and expert. Several activities are planned that

include an introduction to the community through a bus tour and trivia questions. A mock first day of school, Special Professional Assistance Day (SPA) includes mentor and protégé observing each other teach followed by lunch. The final event before the first day of school is a new teacher graduation ceremony attended by the superintendent (Wong, 2002).

In the Clark County, Nevada study, new teachers believe that mentors are not providing any help, particularly in guiding them in completing necessary products and documentation (23percent) and completing school or district paper work (25 percent). Consensuses of the findings were noted in the Arizona 2006 study. However, Kansas 2008, and North Carolina 2006 found the mentor/mentee experience to be rewarding and provided general encouragement and social support.

### **Benefits of Positive Teacher Working Conditions**

#### **Student achievement**

Data collected and analyzed by the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) (2006) show powerful empirical links between teachers' working conditions and student achievement in elementary, middle and, particularly, high schools. CTQ (2006) research proved that improved working conditions were not only central to teachers' well-being and satisfaction, but they were also important to the success of the students they serve (Hirsch, Emerick, Church, & Fuller, 2006). The research indicates that teachers' perception of certain working conditions significantly influence schools' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status and the ability to reach student achievement growth targets (Hirsch, Emerick, Church, & Fuller, 2006, p. 1).



### **Teacher Retention/Attrition**

“The retention of public school teachers has been an issue of continuing concern in education” (Shen, 1997, p. 81). Shen found in the research that districts are financially affected and that students suffer academically when there is astronomical attrition among teachers. Shen (1997) conducted a quantitative study that included 4,461 public school teachers to look at stayers, voluntary movers and leavers. His findings reflect, “First, teachers with less experience tend to move or leave, whereas more experienced teachers tend to stay; second, the amount of salary-in this case, annual salary for all teachers and salary for senior members – was positively correlated with teacher retention; third, appreciation of intrinsic merits of the teaching profession helps teachers remain in teaching; and finally, empowering teachers and giving them more influence over school and teaching policies are also associated with teacher retention” (Shen, 1997, pp. 85-86) “Teaching has been permeated with an egalitarian ethos, a factor that seems to be conducive to teacher attrition” (Shen, 1997, p. 86).

Wong (2002) found that teachers remain in schools where they find that they are considered an integral part of the organization and its goals to reach achievement. From the time of the induction program that is being implemented in Lafourche Parish Public Schools, data show teacher attrition rate has dropped by 80% (Wong, 2002). “If we want quality teachers in our classrooms, we must make new teacher training, support, and retention top priorities. School districts that develop and implement new teacher induction programs send a message to teachers that the district values them, wants them to excel, and hopes they will stay” (Wong, 2002, p. 5).

Marlow, Inman and Betancourt-Smith (1997) conducted a quantitative study of 602 teachers from Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, and Arizona. The study was to aid in the research that will allow leaders to understand why there is instability in the teaching profession and what they can do to help retain teachers. It was determined from the study that leadership is an important factor to teacher retention. They should provide support and time for colleagues to come together and share their thoughts related to teaching and other school issues. In addition, leaders need to promote teaching to the public as the professionalized craft that it is.

### **Job Satisfaction**

“Those who depart because of job dissatisfaction most often cite low salaries, lack of support from the school administration, lack of student motivation, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as the causes of their leaving” (Ingersoll, 2002, p. 26). Wolf (2002) points out those intrinsic as well as external issues are important dynamics in relation to teachers’ values of their importance to their jobs. The concerted effort of leadership to work on changing working conditions will not be an easy task but is a needed change to keep teachers satisfied with their jobs (Ingersoll, 2002). “Workplace conditions appear to play a key role in keeping teachers in the field” (Weiss, 1999, p. 862). “Supportive working conditions can enable teachers to teach more effectively” (Johnson, 2006, p. 3).

### **Teacher Recruitment**

“Our nation must look more closely at the role and responsibilities of the teacher and the factors which contribute to the retention and attrition of teachers to ensure that

the field of education is able to recruit and retain qualified individuals to teach in our schools” (Wolf, 2002, p. 2). Lafourche Parish Public Schools induction program provides new teachers with extensive knowledge of the educational culture of the district, which will enable them to experience the support that the district shares with all teachers in relation to providing solid instructional guidance. “The program has become an important teacher recruitment tool for the district” (Wong, 2002, p. 3).

Providing new teachers with positive experience as they begin their teaching careers is very important. Weiss (1999) found that “adverse workplace conditions may affect new teachers’ commitment and intentions to stay and may leave an indelible imprint on the structure and quality of teaching itself” (p. 862). In addition, Weiss (1999) reports that

When principals communicate their expectations clearly, enforce student rules of conduct and support teachers in doing so, provide instructional or management guidance and necessary materials and when teachers are evaluated fairly and recognized for a job well done, first-year teachers are more inclined to have high morale, to be committed to their career choice and to fully anticipate that they will stay in teaching (p.866).

The tone that leadership sets for the school will provide the recruitment and retention that are needed for the school to be consistent with veteran and novice teachers returning to the school.

### **Principal’s Role in Creating Working Conditions**

The core of the principal’s job is diagnosing his or her particular school’s needs and, given the resources and talents available, deciding how to meet them (Portin,

Schneider, DeArond & Gundlach, 2003, p. 14). “The principal’s role is important and considered the titular leader (Portin, 2004). In fact, a great deal of research indicates that no one other than the school administrator can easily assume the role of visible head of a reform effort” (Marzano, 2003). It must also be noted that school reform and school workplace go hand in hand (Johnson, 1990). The principal can be considered the “Broker of workplace conditions” (Johnson, 2006). “To ensure deeper learning – to encourage problem solving and thinking skills and to develop and nurture highly motivated and engaged learners, for example – requires mobilizing the energy and capacities of teachers. In turn, to mobilize teachers, we must improve teachers’ working conditions and morale. Thus, we need leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession itself” (Fullan, 2002, p. 17).

### **Principal Responsibilities with Protecting Time**

Time is very valuable to teachers. Center for Teaching Quality recommends the following responsibilities principals have to ensure proper working conditions that relate to time for teachers. Principals should incorporate time for teachers to plan and collaborate with their coworkers. It was noted in Blank’s (2001) study that principals who designated more time in the schedules for increased academic learning, kept a positive relationship with district leaders and maintained high expectations for behavior of the students. In addition, Charlotte Advocates for Education (2004) report that team meetings are an important working conditions for teachers. Principals should incorporate time for teachers to meet and share.

CTQ also noted that principals should limit the non-essential duties that teachers have to be responsible for which will allow more time for the teachers to teach. It was

suggested that the principal utilize the community, other administrators or persons who could, within the schools guidelines, handle the extra-curricular duties.

CTQ also recommended that professional development needs to be a way of life in the schools. It needs to be “embedded” and common practice for the teachers and principals. Principals are seen as the leaders of the schools. It was suggested that in order for the principal to be an effective role model the teachers need to see that he/she is working to improve their skills as well.

### **Principal Responsibilities with Protecting Facilities and Resources**

Principals play an important role in student achievement. Providing the teacher with classroom supplies and instructional resources is well received by the teacher (Carlson, 2004). It is a factor that helps with workplace conditions (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004). CTQ also suggests that students and teachers can focus better in a school environment that is viewed as ‘safe, clean and well maintained.

Schneider (2004) reports that facilities are very important to teacher working conditions in schools. He also notes that “As the complexity of educating children has increased and as the importance of teamwork and joint planning for educational activities has permeated the teaching profession, adequate space for teaching and planning has become more important than ever in terms of creating an environment in which teachers will be productive” (p. 11). In his study, he found that principals in New Jersey graded their schools facilities B by and large, one third a C and 10% D or F. Some principals noted that their school were not sufficient certain schools curricula area. However, 80% of principals in the New Jersey public school system reported that their schools were adequate.

### **Principal Responsibilities with Protecting Teacher Empowerment**

Leech and Fulton (2002) found that leaders would be successful with team building. “By sharing power the leader creates a feeling of influence and ownership in organizational success. Leaders may create a sense of covenant by cultivating followers’ capacities to be successful” (p. 11). Researchers have found that facilitative power is important to the tasks related to shared governance (Short & Greer, 2002).

Principals provide support to teachers by conveying they trust them and appreciate what they contribute to the school (Carlson, 2004). Charlottes Advocates for Education (2004) recommend that recognizing and congratulating teachers is a strategy that has been noted by principals to enhance working conditions.

Fullan (2002) is an advocate for a cultural change principal. He finds that a cultural change principal is not selfish with what he/she has learned about leadership. The cultural change principal “works to develop other leaders in the school to prepare the school to sustain and even advance reform after he or she departs” (Fullan, p. 17). Charlottes Advocates for Education (2004) concur with this working condition strategy in the recommendation of establishing ‘teacher leadership positions’.

Blasé and Blasé (1994) conducted a study, which involved 285 teachers. The teachers completed The Inventory of Principals’ Characteristics that Contribute to Teacher Empowerment (IPCCTE). The teachers in the study linked facilitative-democratic strategies to be the key to principals’ strength of leadership in shared governance schools. The study indicated the following key components of teacher empowerment through the leadership of the principal:

- (a) Modeling, building, and persistently supporting an environment of trust among teachers, whom they consider professionals and experts
- (b) Systematically structuring the school to encourage authentic collaboration by establishing readiness and common goals and by responding to the school's unique characteristics
- (c) Supporting shared governance efforts by providing professional development and basic resources
- (d) Supporting teacher experimentation and innovation, granting professional autonomy, and viewing failure as an opportunity to learn
- (e) Modeling professional behavior, especially by exhibiting caring, optimism, honesty, friendliness, and enthusiasm
- (f) Encouraging risk taking and minimizing threat (or constraints on teacher freedom and growth)
- (g) Praising teachers and using other symbolic rewards (e.g., valuing and respecting teachers)
- (h) Setting the stage for discussing and solving the metaproblems of a school through effective communication, openness and trust, use of action research, group participation in decision making, and the use of effective procedural methods for solving problems (Blasé and Blasé, 1994, p. 127).

The study supports the importance that principals are to empowering teachers (Short & Greer, 2002).

In Hill's (2004) study through survey and focus groups, empowerment reflected

importance with no significant mean difference in the domains of empowerment, leadership, and time. The school level data found empowerment among teachers to be weighted second (middle), and third (elementary and high). The descriptive statistics were higher by females than by males and higher by minorities than by majorities (Hill, 2004, p. 177). It was noted that the principals found that empowerment of teachers was enhanced due to them releasing and sharing elements of school jobs that required decision making such as autonomy in the classroom, and managing by leading a school committee or initiatives that will improve the school.

### **Principal Responsibilities with Protecting Leadership**

Leadership methods have been noted by researchers to share a relationship with scope of leadership, the effectiveness of teachers, student achievement, and school culture (Kelley, Thornton & Daugherty, 2005). The principal must play an active role in implementing with regards to positive culture and curriculum changes that will promote student achievement (O'Shea, 2005).

Kelly, Thornton and Daugherty (2005) conducted a study involving the examination of the relationship between the principals' preferred leadership style, the corresponding scores for teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership styles and the perception of school climate. The study was comprised of thirty-one elementary schools, thirty-one principals and one hundred fifty-five teachers.

Statistically significant positive relationships were established between teachers' perceptions of their principals' effectiveness scores and all six climate scores. The results show a connection of school climate being linked to teachers' perceptions of a principal effectiveness. The corresponding correlations between the teachers' perceptions of



principals' flexibility scores and measures of school climate are all negative. If principals are perceived to 'select varying styles over a range of situations', then the teachers feel that the school has poor communication and weak teacher advocacy. The more positive the teachers' perception of their principals' flexibility scores, the less positive their perception of teacher advocacy, and the less effectiveness of communication within the building. Conversely, teachers perceive that less flexible principals lead buildings that serve information, listen to concerns, and support teachers.

The concerns of the teachers in this study suggest they perceive their working conditions are better with a principal who is less flexible and more structured. The principals' self ratings of effectiveness and flexibility were not related to the teachers' ratings. Principals perceived themselves differently. Kelley, Thornton and Daugherty (2005) pointed out that "the old adage that 'perception becomes reality' needs to be considered; teachers' perceptions of principals effectiveness are authentic" (p. 6).

### **Principal Responsibilities with Protecting Professional Development**

It was noted by Defour (2001) that professional development is most beneficial when it is 'job-embedded'. A principal's role is to plan collaboration and "provide focus, parameters and support to help teams function effectively" (p. 2). Defour found that it is important for teachers to incorporate strategies inside the professional learning community which will lead to proficiency. Time seems to be a variable that can hinder professional development (Church, 2005). Church found that principals are responsible for doing what they can within district policy to provide the time needed for professional development. There has always been "a separation between the work of teaching and the teacher as a learner" (Church, p. 19). As quoted in Church, Defour espouses that, "School

leaders must end this distinction between working and learning and create conditions that enable staff to grow and learn as part of their daily or weekly work routines” (p. 63). This is known as job-embedded staff development, which benefits teachers and students in obtaining the goals for student learning. Reading/study groups, lesson study, mentoring and action research are strategies that have been tried in schools that have been successful (Church, 2005).

Principals assess a teacher’s lesson and provide comments. “Honest, clear, and meaningful suggestions and expectations provide a teacher with the greatest opportunity for improvement” (Carlson, 2004, p. 15). In the literature, Sparks (2004) found that it is the principal’s responsibility to build up the quality of teaching and learning in his/her school.

“The principal is like the hub of a wheel with teachers at the end of each spoke. Communication about instruction moves back and forth along the spoke to the hub but not around the circumference of the wheel” (Sparks, 2003, p. 1). This is one idea of how professional learning should occur. The philosophy is for the principal to provide assistance to teachers individually. Another opinion from the research of the National Staff Development Council for teachers to assist each other in learning is deemed very beneficial. Sparks (2003) notes that the principal is the one who cultivates the professional learning community in his/her school in which relationships will grow.

The principal must be the leader of the professional learner community for sustained awareness. With this information, it has been noted that principals are key to the mentoring and induction programs in their schools. Placing a competent veteran teacher with a novice teacher is a win-win situation. The ultimate goal is to have a

qualified teacher in the classroom to help students experience the maximum learning situation. When the principal hires the qualified new teacher, he/she should follow-up by providing the necessary supportive working conditions for the teacher to be successful (Danielson, 2002). Principals would be wise to use the talents that they have in the veteran teachers (Yost, 2002).

Smith and Ingersoll (2004) did a study on the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover. They reported that, with having common planning time and collaboration time with other teachers, the new teachers were forty-three percent less inclined to leave the school and twenty-five percent less inclined to move to another school. In addition, the researchers noted that new teachers who have mentors who are teaching the same subject area are thirty percent less likely to leave; whereas, new teachers with a mentor not in the same subject area are eighteen percent less likely to leave. New teachers who had a good relationship with their principals, and others who held leadership positions were less likely to leave ( $rrr = 0.615$ ,  $p = 0.171$ ) or move ( $rrr = 0.687$ ,  $p = 0.079$ ). They found that “high rates of teacher turnover can inhibit the development and maintenance of a learning community; in turn, a lack of community in a school may have a negative impact on teacher retention, thus creating a vicious cycle” (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Therefore, it is important to provide working conditions that will entice our new teachers to remain, because it could affect the “organizational effectiveness”.

The principal’s role would be to make sure that he is conscious of the research and is placing the appropriate people in positions to encourage the novice teachers to

remain at the school. Boreen and Niday (2004) report that principals have a responsibility to know their teaching staffs and select the best ones to mentor novice teachers.

Time should be scheduled for novice teachers and mentors to work during school. (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004; Johnson, 2006). Johnson (2006) noted novice teachers should receive support to get well adjusted and comfortable in the classroom. Isolation needs to be obsolete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for teachers' working environment.

### **Summary**

Schools are held to the highest level of accountability in student achievement and success. In order to keep students interested and motivated to do their best in school, teachers are a major influence in student success. As shown in the literature, teachers have and will always be the most important factor in student achievement. With the knowledge that teachers are important to the student growth and achievement, research has noted that working conditions stand out to be the catalyst for teacher and student success.

In the research, working conditions have been linked to teacher satisfaction. In order for teachers to perform at their best, it has been determined that their working conditions need to be up to standards. Time, facilities and resources, empowerment, leadership, professional development and mentoring are the teacher working conditions that have been noted in the review of literature to be determining factors as to whether novice or veteran teachers remain at their current work locations or remain in the teaching profession.

Time has been noted as being important to teachers in order for them to do an effective job. Teachers have continually voiced their concerns about the lack of time they

have. Facilities and resources are believed to positively or negatively affect student learning. The unpleasant workplace can be very taxing on a teacher; he/she will not perform at his/her best, and therefore, students will not receive the level of instruction needed to be successful. Teacher empowerment is significant in gaining teachers' respect. Providing teachers with decision making ability gains their trust that they are an important part of the school's function, which will lead to them wanting to do their best. Leadership has been noted in various studies as being the pivotal point of school effectiveness. The leader sets the tone for the school's positive culture, climate, which leads to academic achievement. Professional development that allows teachers to be introduced to strategies that are research based and allows teachers to be reflective will increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom. Research studies have found that teachers who feel that they can make decisions and be respected for them will gain more satisfaction and commitment. Mentoring, which is a part of professional development, has been essential to novice teachers remaining in the profession. Also, the veteran teacher selected to be a mentor feels valuable to be entrusted with the responsibility of sharing his/her wisdom of education with another educator.

It can be seen from the examples that schools need appropriate leadership to guide positive teacher working conditions. When teachers are satisfied with their working conditions, it effects student achievement. In the age of school reform and accountability, the leader will need to provide a workplace that is supportive for novice teachers and veteran teachers because teachers make the most difference in student achievement.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools in Georgia. Although many studies have been conducted to focus on views of teachers concerning working conditions that impact their satisfaction, very few studies have examined the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions to support teachers in their jobs. Specifically, the researcher focused on unveiling how school leaders in the role of the principal address teacher working conditions in elementary, middle, and high schools. In this chapter, the researcher described the research design, instrumentation, participants of the study, data collection, and data analysis.

#### **Research Questions**

**In order to understand the principal's role, the researcher sought to respond to the overarching question: What is the principal's role in creating and maintaining teacher working conditions? To do so, the following sub questions will guide the study:**

1. How do principals identify working conditions?
2. How do principals identify their roles in addressing teacher working conditions in Georgia?
3. What are compelling and constraining forces that the principal faces in improving working conditions?

## Research Design

The study of teacher working conditions yielded much information about what teachers need to be instructionally effective. However, not many studies have been conducted to understand working conditions from the perspective of principals who are largely responsible for creating and maintaining working conditions in their schools. To understand the role of the principal as it relates to working conditions, the researcher chose a qualitative approach because it is a method that reflects the “problematic and routine moments in individual lives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5).

In this qualitative study, the researcher selected case study as the type of design. According to Creswell, case study research is “a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection, involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based-themes” (p. 73). The researcher gained insight into principals’ understanding of working conditions through their lived experiences of creating and maintaining working conditions and the challenges and support in doing so.

Case study was the specific approach used in this qualitative study.

A case study involves the study of “a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 1994, p. 237). Case studies have the following key characteristics (a) the researcher’s purpose is to study a case (b) the researcher collects multiple forms of data (c) the researcher analyzes the data for description and themes and (d) the researcher reports description, themes, and lessons learned from the case (Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 243). The researcher purposely

selected three schools to study the issue of the role of the principal in addressing working conditions based on three school levels: elementary, middle, and high school. These multiple sites allowed for differing perspectives from principals across school levels, especially as the responsibility for working conditions vary across school levels.

Several methods such as interviews, observations, document analysis, and surveys, can be used in case studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Bassey, 1999). For the purpose of this study, the multiple case study design involved five types of collected information. Although Yin (2003) recommends six types, including direct observations, in case study research, the researcher of this study relied on five sources of data. In addition to interviews with principals and teachers from each of the three schools in the study, the researcher collected current documents, such as professional development planning documents, budgets, school improvement team minutes, as well as reviewed each school's websites and observed the inside and outside of the facilities of each school.

The two interviews yielded major types of information. "Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which to understand our fellow human beings" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, pp. 61-62). Through the interview process, this researcher expanded knowledge on how principals perceived their roles in assisting teachers to ultimately improve student achievement. Interviewing is an intense conversation in which the researcher listens for the information or lack of information needed to gather data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Interviews of both principals and teachers within each case served as two major forms of data collection. The interviews with principals were one-on-one, and the interviews with teachers from each school site were focus groups.



According to Creswell, a focus group interview is advantageous when time to collect information is limited and “interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information” (p. 113). The researcher of this study believed that teachers provided insight into their working conditions and prompted each other to reflect on the principal’s role.

### **Participants**

The researcher selected Jet District (a pseudonym) in Georgia, where three schools were selected as sites for the case study. Jet District is generally viewed as one of the fastest-growing areas in Georgia. Despite the tremendous growth the district experienced, it has not generally experienced teacher shortages. The district basically had two geographic areas that varied by socio-economic status, with one area viewed as more affluent, and the other area viewed as less affluent, specifically based on free/reduced lunches. The ethnic profile of Jet District was Caucasian (82.8%), African American (14.9%), Hispanic (2.4%), Multiracial (1.2%), Asian (0.8%) and American Indian(.3%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

To study the principal’s role in creating and maintaining working conditions, the researcher identified three schools in the less affluent geographic region of the district. The researcher identified one of the two high schools in the district, one middle school that was a feeder school to the high school, and one elementary school based on access to the schools and that the principal had two or more years as leader of the school. The schools selected also made AYP the previous school term. With those criteria, the researcher was able to narrow the cases to three schools, referred to in this study as Pride Elementary School, Quality Middle School, and Right High School, for purposes of anonymity.

In each case, the researcher of the study conducted a focus group interview with teachers at each school site. Each focus group included three teachers. The teacher participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) the teacher had worked at the school for one or more years; 2) the teacher was in a leadership position in the school, such as grade level chair, department chair, or a member of the school improvement team; and 3) the teacher was viewed by the others in the school as a leader. The researcher used the school's directory of teacher email addresses located at the school website and sent an email describing the study and asked for volunteers who met the criteria to return an email to the researcher. The first three responded, identified a common time and met at the school for the focus group interview.

### **Instrumentation**

This research project was conducted in several phases as a series of activities that generated data needed for the study. In phase one, the researcher identified and sought from each school current documents, observed the inside and outside of the building, and reviewed the school website. For analysis of documents, observations, and websites, the researcher wrote a narrative used as the instrument to code for broad themes.

In the second phase of the study, the researcher scheduled three principal interviews. The semi-structured interview questions focused on having principals describe their definitions and domains of teacher working conditions. The researcher designed questions (See Appendix A) allowed principals to express their views of the five major domains of working conditions, including: time; facilities and resources; teacher empowerment; leadership; and professional development, as well as forces that impeded or supported their capacity to create and maintain effective working conditions.

The interview questions were developed based on survey questions from previous studies on working conditions, and the researcher's review of the literature. Responses to open-ended questions allowed the participants to explain their roles in creating and maintaining working conditions unique to their experiences as school leaders. The researcher developed interview questions that allowed participants responses to the research questions.

Following principal interviews, the researcher conducted teacher focus group interviews. The researcher simply provided topics to the focus group and asked them to discuss among themselves how each of the topics was addressed in their school. Each of the topics began with the same stem. The topics used in conducting each focus group interview were: use of time; facilities and resources, teacher empowerment; leadership; professional development. (See Appendix B)

### **Pilot Study**

In order to determine validity and precision of the principal interview questions, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study was utilized to gather feedback from the respondents and assist in the development of effective interview questions. The pilot participants should "be in a critical state of mind so that they do not answer your questions but more important, that they reflect critically on the usability of your questions" (Glesne, p. 86). The pilot test was administered to one principal outside of the research study district. Based on the findings from the pilot, adjustments were made to the interview questions for the principals. Glesne (2006) noted that questions are the key to obtaining quality data. The researcher reflected on the feedback and modified the interview questions. In addition, the researcher piloted the focus group protocol with a

group of volunteers from a school inside the district. The researcher used the directory of schools from Jet district and identified the participants.

### **Data Collection**

Upon the completion and analysis of the pilot study, the researcher selected the three principals interviewed based on the identified criteria. To begin the interviews, the researcher applied to the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to do the study. The researcher also applied for approval from the Jet District Board of Education to do the study.

When approval was granted, the principals were contacted to set up interviews. Consent forms were sent to each principal interviewee, through email, explaining the study and requesting their consent to be interviewed. The researcher scheduled appointments to accommodate each interviewee's schedule. The participants were ensured that they would not be identified in the study, and the tapes would be locked in a file cabinet for one year and later destroyed after the completion of this dissertation.

Prior to the interview, the principals were asked to provide documents for analysis. The researcher also sought permission from the principal to conduct a focus group interview of teachers in the school. The researcher verified dates and times for the focus group interviews once the participants had agreed on a common time. Data collection also involved the collection of the following information 1) current documents, such as professional development planning documents, budgets, school improvement team minutes; 2) observation inside and outside of the school facility; and, 3) review of each school's website. This collection was ongoing throughout the study as documents overlapped and made references to other documents.

## Data Analysis

In an attempt to conceptualize the perspectives of the principal's role in maintaining working conditions, the researcher grouped recurring terms, common phrases, and identified common events to identify themes that emerged from the data (Cortazzi, 2001) concerning the central concern of this study: the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions. The researcher gathered all data and data analysis with a narrative technique. As the researcher read and reviewed the documents, recorded observations inside and outside of each school, and reviewed school websites, she wrote a narrative of working conditions for each case and made specific observations of the role of the principal as depicted in these data sources.

Secondly, the researcher coded the interviews from interview transcripts. The researcher began the coding by using the broad domains of working conditions: use of time; facilities and resources; teacher empowerment; leadership; and professional development. With each code, the researcher identified a sub code: principal's view and principal's challenge. From this coding, the researcher identified themes that emerged. As other working conditions emerged, the researcher added those as codes to understand how principals define working conditions in schools and view challenges within the domains.

To respond to research question one, the researcher identified major themes that emerged from transcript analysis (time, etc.) to begin to code interview transcripts. As other working conditions emerged, the researcher added these as codes to understand how principals define working conditions in schools and view challenges within the domains.

To respond to research question one, the researcher identified major themes that emerged from transcript analysis.

To understand the principal's role, the researcher coded interviews to determine major themes that arose from the transcription. In addition, the researcher coded focus group interviews by identifying major responsibilities that principals have assumed in creating and maintaining working conditions in all five domains, and others that may have arisen as major areas. The researcher used document analysis to validate major themes that emerged from interviews. To respond to research question 2, the researcher analyzed major themes from all five data sources.

To respond to research question 3, the researcher relied on major themes that emerged from observation notes and interviews. To understand challenges and opportunities that principals face in maintaining positive working conditions, narrative analysis and interview responses were analyzed by coding, using the words, "challenges" and "opportunities." Field notes and interview responses were analyzed by coding using the words, "challenges" and "opportunities".

### **Summary**

The case study was designed to explore the principal's views and role as it relates to maintaining teacher working conditions. The researcher collected data using five sources of information, including one-on-one interviews with principals, focus group interviews with teachers, current documents, observations, and school websites. Principals from three schools and teacher groups from the respective schools were the participants of the case study. Current documents, such as professional development planning documents, budgets, school improvement team minutes, observations inside and outside of school and each school's website were reviewed and provided data which allowed the researcher's responses to research questions of the study.

A pilot study was conducted and the feedback gathered from the principal respondents and teacher focus groups assisted in the modification of the interview questions. Based on the findings from the pilot, adjustments were made to the interview questions to allow the researcher to collect sufficient data to answer the research questions of the study.

Once data had been collected, the researcher analyzed data through the lens of the common domains of working conditions found in the literature. The researcher reduced the information in the transcripts by coding descriptive terms and phrases under the specified domain. These phrases were used to describe the participant's perspectives of each domain.

Once data had been collected, the researcher analyzed data through the lens of the common domains of working conditions found in the literature. The researcher reduced the information in the transcripts by coding descriptive terms and phrases under the specified domain. These phrases were used to describe the participant's perspective of each domain. These themes developed common codes in each interview transcript. The researcher took the findings and determined the role principals have in creating and maintaining teacher working conditions in Georgia schools.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The researcher's purpose for the study was to explore the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools in Georgia. Teachers' working conditions have been found to be a major factor in school improvement. Many statewide surveys have been conducted to learn about teacher working conditions, especially as they relate to positive school environment and student achievement. Principals, generally perceived to serve as formal leaders of schools, are expected to create and maintain effective working conditions that support teachers' roles in generating high student achievement. The principal is a catalyst in creating a climate for a supportive learning environment for students (Mallak, 1998; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Dove, 2004).

To understand how the principal creates and maintains working conditions conducive to supporting teachers, the researcher employed a case study design with multiple sites. The following overarching research question guided the study: What is the principal's role in creating and maintaining teacher working conditions? The sub-questions were:

1. How do principals identify working conditions?
2. How do principals identify their roles in addressing teacher working conditions in Georgia?
3. What are compelling and constraining forces that the principal faces in improving working conditions?



To report findings of the study, the researcher organized Chapter 4 into three sections. The first section provided an overview of each of the three sites in the case study. First, the researcher described the setting of the study and then provided a demographic profile of the participants related to each site. In the second section, the researcher reported major findings of the study by research sub-questions, providing evidences by major themes and patterns that emerged during data analysis. In the third section, the investigator provided a summary of major and minor findings of the study.

### **Three Sites in Case Study**

While there were many factors that contributed to the construct of teacher working conditions, researchers have generally grouped working conditions that matter to teachers in five domains: time; facilities and resources; teacher empowerment; leadership; professional development (Hirsch, Emerick, Church, Reeves & Fuller , 2007). To delve deeper into understanding how principals create and maintain working conditions in schools, the researcher conducted a case study to explain how principals were addressing teacher working conditions within the five domains.

At each site, elementary, middle and high school, data were collected from an interview with the principals, a focus group of three teachers, and field notes gathered during observations at each school, as well as documents (see Appendices E & F). The case studies of the three sites within Jet School District (pseudonym) provided insight into the principals' role in maintaining working conditions for teachers. Document analysis required coding interviews, field notes, school improvement plans, minutes of various meetings held within each school, and notes from observations and school

websites to generate major themes and patterns that allowed the researcher to understand the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools.

### **School Site One**

Pride Elementary School opened in 2006. It was a one story building located in a rural area of Georgia. Pride Elementary was the largest elementary school in the district, and it presented an inviting environment, as evidenced from the neat grounds and clean entrance. The elementary school was one of eight elementary schools in its home county and served kindergarten – fifth grade students, with a student population of approximately 850 students and a faculty that numbered 104 at the time of the study. The demographic profile of the student population was Caucasian (66%), African American (20%), Hispanic (6%), Multiracial (5%) and Asian (3%). Approximately 46% of the students received free and reduced lunch. Due to the free and reduced lunch population of students, Pride Elementary School is designated as a targeted-assisted Title One School. Pride Elementary School has made AYP each school year since the school opened in 2006.

#### **Pride Elementary focus group.**

The researcher identified three teachers at Pride Elementary School who met criteria for being key informants concerning the principal's role in maintaining working conditions. From the roster of teachers, the researcher asked the principal to identify teachers who had worked at the school for one or more years, who held a leadership position within the school, and who were viewed by others in the school as leaders. The principal identified several who met the criteria. She asked if one teacher could be included because she was pursuing her doctoral degree, and the principal wanted her to

have the experience of being in the group. From the list, the researcher randomly selected three to ask if they would serve as members of a focus group to respond to interview questions in a group setting.

The interview was held in the principal's office and lasted one hour. The following description of each participant provides a basic demographic profile of the focus group at Pride Elementary.

***Pride Elementary focus group participant one.***

Denise was a white female in the age range of 30 to 40. She held a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education from Georgia Southern University, a Master's Degree in Educational Administration from Grand Canyon University, and a T-5 certificate in Leadership with a TSS endorsement. Having taught at another elementary school in the district for 13 years, she moved to Pride Elementary School, and was in her 14th year of teaching. She taught PreK during her first two years of teaching, and she has been teaching kindergarten for the last twelve years.

Denise had served as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) chair at her school, as a member of the school's leadership team, and as a mentor to new teachers. She had earned the honor of being named teacher of the year, and she was approved to serve as a clinical supervisor to Georgia Southern University (GSU) student teachers. Denise was a member of the school improvement committee and data team. Denise was also leading her grade level's interventions team. Denise was excited about plans to supervise a GSU student teacher in the 2011 spring semester. At the time of the study, Denise was teaching kindergarten.

***Pride Elementary focus group participant two.***

Evelyn was a white female in the age range of 20 to 30. She held a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood and Middle School Education from the University of Georgia and a Master's Degree in Elementary Reading and Literacy from Walden University. She also held a Specialist Degree and was pursuing a doctoral degree in Teacher as a Leader from Walden University. Evelyn was in her fourth year of teaching with all of her experience at Pride Elementary. At the time of the study, she was teaching fifth grade.

***Pride Elementary focus group participant three.***

Faith was a white female in the age range of 40 to 50. She held a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education and a Master's of Science in Education with a concentration in curriculum and instruction. All of her degrees were received from Hood College. Faith had served on the school improvement team. Faith had been teaching for twenty years. At the time of the study, she was teaching first grade.

***Dynamics of the Pride Elementary focus group.***

The ladies in the focus group appeared to be very comfortable with each other. They laughed and smiled often during the interview. When comments were made by one of the ladies, the others would confer or add their agreement of what was being said. Denise led many of the discussions in a very enthusiastic manner.

**Pride Elementary principal.**

At each school site, the researcher individually interviewed the principal in his/her office for ninety minutes. As the principal of Pride Elementary, Amanda was a white female in the age range of 50 to 60. She held a Bachelor of Science degree in education from the University of Georgia, a Master's degree from Armstrong Atlantic State University, and an Educational Specialist Degree in Leadership from Georgia Southern University. Amanda was in her fourth year as principal at Pride Elementary and had previous experience as an assistant principal at another elementary school in Jet district. Prior to becoming an assistant principal, she had been a lead teacher at an elementary school in Jet District.

Prior to serving in an administrative position, Amanda had been a classroom teacher for thirteen years. Amanda taught first, second and fourth grades during that time. She then served as Special Instructional Assistance teacher for 3 years, serving kindergarten and first grade classrooms. All of these experiences preceded her being named first principal of the new Pride Elementary School in 2006.

**Field notes.**

The researcher visited Pride Elementary on three occasions to collect data from observations and the school's website. School improvement plan, various team minutes, master schedule, school budget, and field notes were gathered during the observations. The school was very organized, and the master schedule reflected grade level organization in the school. As evidenced by the documents, the administrator sent out a newsletter every Tuesday in lieu of holding weekly faculty meetings. The field notes yielded a portrayal of working conditions from written data, which provided the

researcher an overview of how the school viewed time, resources, leadership within the school, as well as the focus of professional learning at the site.

### **School Site Two**

Quality Middle School was one of three middle schools in Jet District. The school opened in 2002. It was a one story building, and the school had a very inviting look to it, as evidenced from the clean grounds, neat facilities, and open foyer to the school. The middle school served sixth through eighth grade students, with a student population of approximately 1045 students and 114 faculty. The demographic profile of the student population at the time of the study was Caucasian (72.2%), African American (19.2%), Hispanic (3.1%), Multiracial (3.3%), Asian (1.1%) and American Indian (.4%). Quality Middle School is located in a rural area in Jet district. Approximately 38.9% of the students received free and reduced lunch. Quality Middle School has made AYP each school year since 2002, except for one academic year.

#### **Middle school focus group.**

The researcher identified three teachers who had worked at Quality Middle School for one or more years, who held a leadership position in the school, and who were viewed by others in the school as a leader. These three participants met with the researcher to respond to interview questions in a group setting.

The one hour interview was conducted in one of the interviewee's classrooms. The following description of each participant provides a basic demographic profile of the focus group at Quality Middle School.

***Quality Middle school focus group participant one.***

George was a white male in the age range of 50 to 60. He held a M. A. degree and a Specialist degree from the University of Georgia and had been teaching for 21 years. He was assigned to teach technology at Quality Middle School at the time of the study. George had been named Teacher of The Year and had served as SACS committee chair. George was also a Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) district technology award recipient.

***Quality Middle school focus group participant two.***

Helen was an African American female in the age range of 30 to 40. She held a Bachelor of Science in English from the University of Georgia and a Master of Education in Secondary English Education from Armstrong Atlantic State University. From Georgia Southern University, she received an Educational Specialist degree in Teaching and Learning. Helen plans to pursue a doctoral degree in Educational Administration in the near future.

Helen had been teaching for eight years. At the time of the study, she was assigned to teach English Language Arts (ELA) at the middle school. Helen was a team leader, data team facilitator, and spelling bee coordinator. Helen was also a Master teacher, new teacher mentor, and the ELA curriculum council liaison.

***Quality Middle school focus group participant three.***

India was a White female in the age range of 40 to 50. She received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Armstrong Atlantic State University. India had been teaching for 9 ½ years and at the time of the study, was teaching Science in the middle school. India had been a former Teacher of the Year at the school, had served on the

school improvement committee, data team, and the school council. India also had experience as the middle school committee chairperson.

***Dynamics of the Quality Middle focus group.***

The teachers in the focus group had a very interactive conversation. They viewed many things in the school differently. George, the male teacher, led the conversations with very lengthy and thoughtful answers to the interview questions. He asked the researcher if he could be frank with his answers. India and Helen spoke very softly and were not as vocal as George.

**Quality Middle school principal.**

Barbara, principal of Quality Middle School, was an African American female in the age range of 30 to 40. She held a Bachelor of Science degree in Middle School with a Major in Mathematics and a Minor in Language Arts from the University of Georgia. She also held Master and Specialist Degrees in Educational Leadership from Georgia Southern University. At the time of the study, she was enrolled in a doctoral degree program in Educational Administration at Georgia Southern University. Barbara had served as assistant principal for two years at Quality Middle School before being named principal. Prior to being an assistant principal, she was a teacher for three years at a Middle School in Jet district.

**Field notes.**

Quality Middle School was visited by the researcher on several occasions to collect data. The school website yielded pertinent information in regards to celebrating the accomplishments of various student organizations. Through physical observations, the researcher noticed the cleanliness of the outside grounds, free of trash, as well as the



inside of the school building. The researcher could sense that school pride was the culture and climate of Quality Middle School. School improvement plan noted the procedures that are set aside to recognize and assist students who are weak with reading and/or math. Various team minutes listed teachers on different committees which leads to teacher empowerment. The teachers at Quality Middle participated in data team meetings which allowed the teachers to recognize students' weak areas and recommend meaningful professional development. The master schedule, provided to the researcher, showed the validity of the teachers having school planning, school budget, and field notes were gathered during the observations. The field notes gathered during observations yielded a portrayal of working conditions from written data, which provided the researcher an overview of how the school viewed time, resources, leadership within the school, as well as the focus of professional learning at the site. The school was organized by grade level, with teams of teachers assigned to groups of students in each grade level.

### **School Site Three**

Right High School was one of two high schools in Jet School District. In the history of Jet District, Right High School was the only high school for several decades. The new and improved Right High School was opened in Fall of 1989. The student population at the time of the study consisted of more than 1700 students. The demographic profile of the student population was Caucasian (67.59%), African American (23.66%), Hispanic (3.53%), Multiracial (3.87%), Asian (.75%) and American Indian (.57%). Right High School met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-09 school years. Approximately 38.9% of the students

received free and reduced lunch. The Right High School is a targeted-assisted Title I high school.

**Right High school focus group.**

The researcher identified three teachers who had worked at Right High School for one or more years, held leadership positions and were viewed by others in the school as leaders. The researcher asked if they would serve as a member of a focus group to respond to interview questions in a group setting.

The interview lasted one hour in a conference room at the school. The following description provides a basic demographic profile of each focus group participant at Right High School.

***Right High school focus group participant one.***

Jane was a white female in the age range of 30 to 40. She held a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism with a degree in Advertising from the University of Georgia. From Georgia Southern University, she received secondary English Education certification, a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, and a Specialist Degree in Teaching and Learning. Jane had been teaching at Right High School for six years.

Jane served as the English Department chairperson, was a member of the school improvement team and the school leadership team. Jane was also the sponsor for the Beta Club. She had served as the cheerleading sponsor for two years. At the time of the interview, she was assigned to teach English at the high school.

***Right High school focus group participant two.***

Kevin was a white male in the age range of 30 to 40. He held an Associate Degree in Education from Abraham Baldwin College. He held a Bachelor of Education and a

Masters of Education in Secondary Social Science Education from Georgia Southern University. He had been teaching for twelve years. Kevin had represented Right High School as teacher of the year. He had also been the secretary/clerk of the social studies department for the last few years. He was a football analyst on the school radio station during football season. He is also in charge of the yearbook staff. At the time of the study, Kevin was assigned to teach Social Studies at the high school.

***Right High school focus group participant three.***

Lori was a white female in the age range of 30 to 40. She held a Bachelor and Masters of Fine Arts in Graphic Design from Savannah College of Art and Design. Lori had been teaching for seven years, had been named teacher of the year (TOTY) and served on the Superintendent's Council during her tenure at Right High School. She had served as the teacher liaison for the school council and had also served as sub-site director for Right High School website, and had assisted the webmaster in training faculty and staff throughout the school district. She was assigned to teach Graphic Design and Communication at the high school at the time of the study.

***Dynamics of Right High school focus group.***

The teachers in the focus group had a pleasant demeanor toward each other. Kevin was very vocal and he led the group discussion. Lori and Jane participated in answering the questions by, many times, piggy backing off of what Kevin said.

***Right High school principal.***

As the principal of Right High School, Charles was a white male in the age range of 30 to 40. He held a Bachelor of Science degree in Sports Management and Business Education. He also held Masters and Specialist degrees in Educational Administration.

All of his degrees were from Georgia Southern University. He had been accepted to the doctoral program in Educational Administration at Georgia Southern University. Charles was a teacher for five years. He worked as an assistant principal/athletic director at the high school for two years prior to being named principal at Right High School in January 2006.

### **Field notes.**

Right High School was traditionally organized by grade levels 9-12, and the teachers worked within a departmental structure. Ample administrative office, conference and counseling space exists within the school. As evidenced in the minutes, administrators stayed consistently visible by conducting walkthroughs. Right High School were awarded a grant and documents reflected that students have a voice through student council. Teachers, parents and community members have a say in school business within the school council organization. On Right High School website, the principals had a page utilized to welcome students and stakeholders to the school. A teacher's page on the school's website is available for the students to utilize. School pride were evidenced by students dressed in sports uniforms and club shirts on Fridays.

### **Summary of Setting of the Study**

The three schools that constituted the three sites in this case study were all within one school system, where district-wide policies were implemented at the public school district level. The elementary school opened in 2006, and the middle school in the study opened in 2002. The high school was over 20 years old. The elementary and high schools were both targeted-assistance Title I schools. The elementary school met AYP since its opening in 2006. The middle school had met AYP every year since their

opening in 2002, with the exception of one school term. The high school had met AYP in academic year 2008-09. The elementary, middle and high schools predominantly served White students. Almost one-half of the elementary school students receive free and reduced lunches, and more than one-third of the middle school and high schools students were approved for free and reduced lunches.

The demographic data of the faculty participants were analyzed to reveal that, of the nine focus group participants, six of the female teachers were White, one of the female participants was African American and both of the male participants were White. They varied in age ranging from 20 to 60. In terms of educational levels, all participants held, at the least, a Bachelor of Science degree, while four of the nine held Master's Degree. In the study, three of the focus group participants held Specialist Degrees and one was pursuing a doctoral degree at the time of the study.

The demographic data of the principals in the study revealed that one was a White male, one was a White female, and one was an African American female. They ranged in age from age 30 to 60. The three principals all held Educational Specialist degrees. One was pursuing her doctoral degree, and one had been accepted into a doctoral program.

### **Major Findings of the Study**

From all of the documents, including transcripts of the interviews with principals, transcripts of interviews with focus groups, and field notes, the researcher coded the data and then analyzed the data to identify major themes and patterns. From these major themes and patterns, the researcher organized them to respond to research questions.

Following a review of the literature on the principal's role in maintaining teacher working conditions, the researcher developed codes using definitions of working

conditions, including the five major domains of time, facilities and resources, leadership, teacher empowerment, and professional development.

### **Research Question #1**

Research Question 1: How do principals identify working conditions?

To respond to the first sub-research question, the researcher coded responses from principal interviews and teacher focus groups. Principals were asked to describe major school conditions that attracted and served to retain teachers. They were also asked to describe a major working condition that influenced teacher satisfaction within their schools. The researcher also coded responses and discussions across all focus groups to determine how teachers perceived what the principal defined as working conditions. In addition, the researcher coded field notes from websites to understand how principals portrayed working conditions in their respective schools. From an analysis of statements, responses, and field notes by codes, the researcher found that principals defined working conditions that matter to teachers in three major domains. Principals identified instructional leadership, including being visible and protection of instructional time; teacher empowerment; and leadership that is student-centered and team-oriented as major components of the definition of working conditions.

#### **Instructional leadership.**

##### ***Being visible.***

Instructional leadership is defined as leadership behaviors that include defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school learning climate. Principals in this study identified instructional leadership as a major component of the construct of working conditions. Principals described being

visible, a function of instructional leadership, as very important to teacher satisfaction. For example, Amanda, elementary school principal, stated, “I think what leadership looks like is us out in the building. We try to... um... be in as many classrooms as we can and walkthroughs is one way that we have actual documentation. And plenty of times I am up and down the halls and I do not have my 3 minute walkthrough forms with me but I am still in and out. So I think they (teachers) see leadership as being visible.”

The focus group of elementary teachers described the principal constantly “being visible,” which they appreciated, as supportive of their work. Denise stated that the administration is “probably the most involved as I’ve ever worked for. Um, they are constantly in and out of the classroom and at first I thought it was because I was new here. You know I don’t feel like I’m being watched here but I know that they are on top of everything. They never sit still and that is huge.”

Charles, the high school principal, also stated that being visible was important to teachers. He stated, “I think teachers and others appreciate that ...um... that I am not a sit behind the desk leader. That you know that I am out and about and involved.” Quality Middle School focus group participants also felt that a supportive factor was a principal who is “out and observing.”

### **Protection of instructional time.**

#### ***Limited interruptions.***

Protecting instructional time is another one of the functions of instructional leadership. Teachers appreciate conditions that principals facilitate to maximize the time needed to do their jobs. The elementary principal shared her actions that she employs to ensure instructional time is protected. Amanda stated, “I also want to know priorities and

I promise my teachers every year that I will protect instructional time. I do everything as far as limiting our announcements. We do them first thing in the morning and last thing in the afternoon. Discipline which can be a disruption to the instructional day...if there is a child that is interfering with the learning of others, then I go and remove that child, handle the issue and hopefully get them back as soon as possible but make that decision.”

The principal supervises the work of teachers, and serves as the key facilitator between the teachers and making sure nothing is interfering with their instructional time. To support how teachers view the principal’s role in protecting time, Evelyn from the focus group at Pride Elementary school observed, “The first thing that comes to my mind is that, she’s very protective of your instructional time. If you are teaching, and she comes in there... it’s because she’s watching not cause she wants ... you know ...to know something...unless it’s something extremely important. They don’t come over the loud speaker, the intercom ...because you know there are places where you are like, really? And I know like with little kids, ...you lose them and it might take ten, fifteen more minutes to get them back in that zone you had them in. So I know I appreciate that in terms of instructional time.”

The middle school focus group echoed this aspect of the principal’s role. Helen stated, “In talking about instructional time, I think the principal ...the current principal kinda keeps that sacred. We don’t really have a lot of interruptions during the actual class time. Not until toward the end of the day with athletics and stuff like that so... um... so the actual instruction time to me is kept sacred. That’s what I see.” India described the interruptions at the end of the day by stating, “I’m kinda frustrated on a little bit of that of



what you touched on at the end. Fifth period every two weeks... my fifth period class is cut in half for the (mascot's name), the athletes get checked out during that period. The announcements come on, and for me, this year, I have the crack class this period, not the inclusion class but the ones who have slipped through the cracks somewhere. So they are the ones that I need to see and they get shortchanged regularly.”

The comments shared by the principals and the teachers revealed that protecting instructional time is very important, and at the end of the day, time may not be as protected for instruction.

The teachers believed in making sure students had the time they needed to be successful in the classroom because excellent teaching is dependent upon the protected time teachers have with students. Evidence of protecting teachers' time was noted in the weekly flyer that the principal at the elementary and the high school sent out in order to not have to have long announcements in the mornings. The various minutes from each school showed emphases on using the time that is available in class.

### **Teacher Empowerment. (Encourager)**

#### ***Treat teachers with respect.***

Teacher empowerment is defined as investing teachers with rights to participate in determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach. As a working condition, empowerment has been linked to student achievement. In this study, principals identified it as a major component of working conditions. The elementary principal, Amanda, put it in perspective by indicating that teachers would rather feel empowered than to earn more salary. Amanda stated that, “I think that if you look at teachers in Jet District (sic), they come here and

most of them stay. It's not necessarily the money because we know that our salaries are a little less than some counties around us so I don't think it's that. I do think it's the support and a positive working environment." She described the positive working environment as one in which they have a voice in school procedures and school policies.

High school principal Charles described the principal's job of being one of treating teachers with respect. He stated,

I think the biggest thing you have to realize as a principal whenever you are working with the number of staff we are working with here is number one you treat them like professionals. You don't treat them like they are kids cause they're not kids. And you... um ...you let them know that your expectations is of them to be professionals and you be flexible enough to allow those teachers to make decisions. And I think by doing that you show that you care and they are needed. When they feel like they are needed and have input, then I think morale is always better. Um you know I think that is important.

In defining working conditions that matter, he thought that asking for teacher input is a major facet of empowerment.

The middle school principal also defined positive working conditions in terms of teacher empowerment. Barbara's view on empowering teachers was summed up in the statement:

I think here at Quality our teachers appreciate the fact that I think that they earnestly know that we care about them. That we do nurture an environment that their opinions matter ...that we try to cater to the morale of the faculty. Um we understand that this is a business and that this is a job, but we also try to have a

family-oriented network here and we do talk to each other on more of a family basics and we try to be proactive with conflict and things like that so I've always been taught that if a teacher knows that you care, they will do what they can... they will do their job more effectively and that's what the main thing I try to do is show that we do care and we do sincerely appreciate everything that they do and that helps our environment here.

The principal's support of teachers in being actively involved in the way school is run was an important facet of working conditions. In the focus groups, teachers described the principal's support as supportive in various ways. India from Quality Middle school stated that "I think they leave us alone, you know." Pride Elementary teacher Faith shared that "...involving the faculty and the community in decision making processes" is one of the ways she finds that her principal empowers them as well as other stakeholders. High school teacher Jane found that teacher empowerment can be really simple: "just positive feedback, any kind of encouragement just something big or small. Just a pat on the back." The teacher responses reflected that teacher empowerment was very important and it is not that hard for principals to accomplish.

**Leadership. (*Communication and team-oriented*)**

***Listening.***

Providing strong school leadership that is student-centered and team-oriented emerged as a key element of working conditions. Being an effective communicator was a working condition that principals identified as key to a positive school environment, one in which teachers want to work. For example, one of the principals (Amanda) stated, "So I feel like that they know they are valued, and their opinions are valued, and that I am

going to listen to them and that they are appreciated.” The teachers in the middle and high schools also believed that principals demonstrate overall school leadership, and that is a key component of positive working conditions.

Barbara, middle school principal, discussed team-centered school leadership by describing how she builds leadership team members. “We do cater to the person, we do listen to what their concerns are and we try to work with the person versus the fact that they are an employee.” Charles, high school principal, also defined positive working conditions as conditions in which he is a good listener. He stated, “I’m in favor of having small department meetings that you can... um ...empower teachers to have input and ...and listen to them... um... cause they all have good ideas.” The team approach to school leadership was important to him, and being a good communicator emerged as a facet of leadership that teachers appreciated.

The teachers at Pride Elementary stated that their principal was a great communicator. Faith’s thoughts on leadership were expressed in the following way: “I have worked in a lot of schools and ...um... the school setting that I liked the best was the one where there was a strong administrator who... um... like you said ...relates to the teachers and the teachers could relate to and ....um ....and also have high expectations and communicated those high expectations to the staff and the students.”

All of the schools’ websites had parent portals, which provided an avenue for parents or older students to view how they are doing academically. The website management was a strategy used by the school to demonstrate how the school was student-centered. The website allowed parents and students access to the school and other pertinent information regarding PTA and other meetings. They could also determine

when community service activities were scheduled so that they could participate in them and instilled in the students the idea of community involvement. School leadership was focused on serving the wide community, and teachers appreciated this aspect of their working conditions.

As evidenced in various meeting minutes and school improvement plans, each school focused on their students in different ways. Pride Elementary school teachers, administrators, math consultant, as well as intervention leaders, had conferences with targeted students to encourage and motivate students who struggled with math. There was also evidence of a contest they conducted when they were getting ready for the CRCT. Winners were able to throw pies at an administrator, which was a strategy to indicate that school leaders cared about the work of teachers and students in the school. At Right High School, at-risk students were assigned to an administrator to discuss academic progress. The Title I liaison implemented a reward/incentive program for identified Title 1 students.

### **Summary of Findings to Research Question 1**

From the data analysis, several major themes emerged to explain how principals defined working conditions. Principals identified instructional leadership, including being visible and protection of instructional time; teacher empowerment; and leadership that is student-centered and team-oriented, as major components of the definition of working conditions. There was agreement among all who were interviewed that positive working conditions can be defined in terms of caring, communicative, and collaborative school leaders. Not only is it important for the principal to be visible, but principals believed that their visibility, their being a good communicator and a good listener, were appreciated by

teachers. Teacher empowerment was another dimension of working conditions that emerged as critical to teacher satisfaction.

### **Research Question #2**

Research Question 2: How do principals identify their roles in addressing teacher working conditions in Georgia?

To respond to this research question, the researcher studied principal responses to questions concerning leadership roles in protecting instructional time, facilities and resources, teacher empowerment, leadership, and professional development. The researcher also identified major themes from responses obtained from the focus group discussions on the principal's role in protecting instructional time, facilities and resources, teacher empowerment, leadership, and professional development.

#### **Time.**

##### ***Don't overwhelm us.***

Protecting instructional time is a major function of instructional leadership. Principals in this study explained that handling disruptive students, providing common planning time for instruction and personal planning, and not interrupting instructional time with announcements as three major functions that teachers expected from administrators. If the principal acts in a timely manner to respond to disruptive students in the classroom, that becomes a major procedure in protecting instructional time.

Another way that principals described how they address time as an important working condition was to provide planning time for teachers. Middle school principal Barbara shared how she provides common planning time for instructional planning and personal planning:

Well the time that our teachers are given on our campus...each teacher has a planning period that is 75 minutes. Seventy-five minutes to do planning or whatever they need to do basically and... I think and every campus doesn't have that. I think that's been very beneficial for my staff so there isn't so much complaint because they do get 75 minutes planning period. But they also, during that time, have time to do collaboration, data team meetings. That 75 minutes... an hour and fifteen minutes gives them time to do some things that... um... they didn't necessarily have time to do during instructional time. That's also time that I have... you know at times .... allows them if they have to run to the doctor and come right back ....I'll allow them to do that.... um ....so they have a good allotment of time to do ...I think ...to do what they need to do.

If the principal provides a block of planning time, that time can not only be used for planning instruction, but managing personal lives so that instructional time is protected for noninterference.

Charles, high school principal, also explained that providing planning time is an important facet of working conditions for teachers:

I think that time to work with teachers in their department is vital. Um... what we have done at Right High School is ...uh... make it so that our academic teachers have common planning so that at least once a week they can get together and work on academic type stuff. You know, no housekeeping type stuff, but academic type stuff and that is ...um.... I think it is important to provide time ...um... for teachers so that they can work and collaborate. Um, you know as professionals, especially at a high school of this size you have too many people

that are so busy in the mornings, so busy in the afternoon, whether it be extra curricula activities, meetings, you know whatever the case may be, when we can provide them time, forty five minutes a week of set aside time for those teachers to work together on academic stuff, we should be able to accomplish some goals.

Principals believe common planning time is a strategy to encourage collaboration and focus on academics. If the principal does not structure the common time, collaboration and academic discussion may not occur because of the many demands placed on teachers outside of the classroom.

At Right High School, Kevin, a teacher, observed that, “Well one issue that hits home for at least two of us sitting here is our planning periods. I think one thing that the principal has to do is to protect us as much as possible from losing ...you know ...that time because we are pulled into so many different directions. Since we don’t have ...um ...necessarily all the subs that we need. So I think what a principal has to do is be very careful that we don’t feel overwhelmed.” Protecting planning time was viewed as a leadership function that principals can use to facilitate positive working conditions.

Planning periods provide teachers an opportunity to reduce the overwhelming demands of the job. Evelyn observed, “And then in terms of planning, we have collaboration, like our common grade level planning and that’s pretty well preserved.” Lori also identified principals accommodating flexible working schedules as an important consideration in positive working conditions.

I appreciate, for example, the principal we have here ...that he allows us to come in and work late and work on the weekends. I’ve been in certain schools where, at 4:30, they come on the intercom and say we are locking the gates you



must leave. And those teachers, I mean they have to leave. There is no choice. But, the other thing too that is kinda of refreshing as far as the principal is most of the time that I am in here on the weekends, I will run into the principal. Cause he is always out here and the kids are always riding their bikes up and down the hall. You know so.... um so, that is you know I do appreciate that they do that he does allow the time because others are told because of the budget restrictions they just cut it off you are not allowed in there.

In addition to protecting planning time, teachers also viewed ways that school administrators protect instructional time. Faith also recognized that “not just our school, but this county really protects our instructional time. They do it with their school calendar.” Denise agreed with the same thoughts, “I think this county has been really good at preserving those solid blocks of instructional time.” In other words, student holidays are planned at strategic times and principals do not interrupt the school day with announcements. Amanda also described how she, as a principal protects instructional time: “I definitely try to be a supporter. I also want to know priorities and I promise my teachers every year that I will protect instructional time. I do everything as far as limiting our announcements. We do them first thing in the morning and last thing in the afternoon.” Pride Elementary teachers discussed how faculty meetings are always held on Tuesday’s and they are made aware of agendas well in advance of the date. They also discussed that “housekeeping stuff ....she (the principal) takes care on a flyer every week. You know cause there is no point of wasting time on stuff that people can read and understand themselves. You know to mark your calendar and you know on Tuesday to look for it.”

The teachers also discussed how nice it was to be able to come to the school and work on weekends and holidays. One teacher stated, "I came in over Thanksgiving here and it was nice to come in and work. I feel like that, on one hand, you do have to protect the security of the building, but that's also saying I trust you as my teacher. Right, and kinda remembering what it's like being a teacher. Yea, they remember that and let you come in and get your stuff done. And I think also along that same note they trust us and they've developed a great relationship with you know if you have to leave fifteen minutes early like for a doctor's appointment or something."

Denise shared what she felt was an outstanding show of commitment to protection of their time. "We had Kindergarten registration at the central registration office and um you know we get off at 3 in the afternoon, well our instructional supervisor and our assistant principal came over because the registration office stays open till 5. They stayed that extra time so we wouldn't have to. Because they felt like it wasn't fair to make us work until 5. You know so that was (thoughtful) and I know I would have been willing to and they were like no... you had to be there at 7:30 and you are not going to be expected.... They were expecting it of themselves and not of us. They were protective of us. And that makes you, when you are treated like a professional, it empowers you and it motivates you to put forth a little more. You gotta make people want to come here in the mornings. I mean they all are like thank you for doing this, thank you for doing that. You get a lot of that. More so here than anywhere I've ever seen."

Jane also described how her principal helped facilitate working conditions:

I think our principal is wonderful um ...being lenient where time is concerned. If you need to take 30 minutes during your planning to run to a doctor's

appointment or what have you he doesn't dock you that time because he just allows you to make it up after school or before school or another day. Where some principals will make you take a fourth a day or a half a day for running to the doctor. Or if you are running a few minutes late, I mean he is not snatching the books up. And I think I know for me personally, being the person that runs late all the time for everything in my life, it means a lot to me that he's not just standing there waiting to snatch that paper when you maybe having a rough morning and I think he does take into consideration that a lot of people do stay late so why dock them that time. So I really appreciate that.

Quality Middle School teachers also shared their thoughts on how their principal addressed creating working conditions related to time. India stated, "I know our principal has been fighting for and fighting hard because that is one of the things at least it has been mentioned at the superintendent advisory committee meeting that the middle school level was doing away with our common planning. And so I know that Ms. Barbara's been fighting on our behalf." One of the most important ways that principals support positive working conditions is to protect time, including planning time. Planning time in this study was viewed as time to prepare for instruction, collaborate with colleagues on instructional issues, and to allow personal time to take care of professional and personal business.

## **Facilities and Resources.**

### ***School Pride.***

As one component of working conditions, facilities and resources can be challenging for principals. In hard economic times, resources for schooling can be cut or reduced, and many see that outside influence beyond the scope of the principalship, However, in this study, the researcher found that participants were very proud of the upkeep of their facilities and the adequacy of resources within their schools. Amanda shared that, “I know that administration is in charge of that and buildings also, so I try to see that they have a very clean, safe environment in which to teach and that’s not a concern of theirs at all. I’ve been very pleased with that and not just here. You know this school is beautiful. It is our newest elementary school.” With the high school being over 20 years old, principals in the district saw the condition of the building as well-maintained. Amanda stated, “...Right High School, people don’t realize that school has been built as long time as it has because it is still in very good shape and the children are taught to respect property. So I think that is important.”

When principals discussed resources for teachers, they recognized that teachers do not always have all of the resources they need. As principals, they felt very responsible for providing necessary materials. One principal described how she deals with budgets:

Facilities and resources... um... we try the best we can with our budget to provide teachers with money that they need to order the materials. We do that at the beginning of the year and we hold some back so that mid-year.... so that they have some more. And so we try to allocate the funds to meet their

needs....anything we have so far as budget. When we make money for the general funds, for like school pictures and those types of things, we know that technology is a need here. And even though (district-wide), we have been getting... prior to this year... those five interact classrooms a year, we've been kinda behind here at Pride... with it being a new elementary school. So we are emphasizing that any extra money that we have ...which is not much... but any that we have we try, little by little, to add 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms till we get all of our classrooms outfitted with that technology.

Not many strategies beyond the typical fundraising for extra funds were described for generating funds for curriculum needs. Barbara observed:

We use the budget that is allotted to us at the beginning of the school year... um... that is given to us from the board of education. And then we working with (name), my bookkeeper, and my instructional supervisor, we divvy out to different departments how much they are allotted for the school year. And a lot of people were cut for the money, but whatever we utilize we try to maximize many resources with the money we are given. And then throughout the year we beg and borrow to pay Paul. (laughs) And you know if we truly need something um I find other resources to get it or I contact the board to see what type of grants or funds are available.

However, no evidence of grant funds was identified in a documents analysis, and no other means for securing funds were found in school improvement minutes or website postings.

A practice that seemed common across all schools, in terms of resources, was making sure teachers were aware of revenues and had a voice in allocation of funds.

Charles stated, “I think resources in general are very important. This goes down to where you sit down with your department heads and your department heads sit down with your teachers and you take their input into you know what you budget. Um and of course you try to guide them in the direction that you want to make sure that things that are budgeted that’s going to help instruction. And I think it is important that you include them.”

Even though there may have been limited resources, principals communicated desires to provide teachers with resources they needed, and that expression was important to teacher satisfaction. One teacher observed that her principal wants:

to make sure you have what you need to teach. And you know it’s been very tight with the budget ...like copies... for example. You know we’ve got the lease with the copier and there is a certain amount of copies and you know she has reiterated that with us several times. You know we want to make sure you have the materials you need to teach but please be selective... you know... don’t be running off everything under the sun, so you know that is something as far as she wants us to have our resources and then the instructional supervisor is always asking us what do you all need. What are some things you need,... asking for a kinda wish list and that... so those things are always communicated to us as well. I always feel like I’m never without. I don’t feel like I really need that and I don’t have you know.... I feel like we have what we need um to teach.

George, who teaches technology, had some strong opinions in regards to the lack of funding for technology, but he did not see the principal as fundamental in providing resources. Instead, he saw the pitfall in terms of state shortcomings: “I’ve always felt that this school got shortchanged on the technology aspect of resources for several reasons.

One reason is it's not a Title One school um ...and I understand that the county is working with limited funds for technology resources. I think it was a mistake when the state took the technology funds out of the HOPE deal that they made with the people. Because when we voted the lottery in, the deal was (that) schools were going to get technology." It seems that teachers nor principals view the principalship as a political voice or as advocacy for resources beyond state allocations.

However, the technology teacher described how proactive leadership provides technological resources. His wife works in a neighboring county, and he admired the resources provided:

The county has provided her with a laptop um a state of the art laptop with two batteries, an external key board, a external mouse, a bag to carry it in, um running all of the latest software including Microsoft office. That laptop she is free to use that on her personal time in any way she sees fit because they feel that teachers should be comfortable with technology and of course they allow them to do that. That laptop will be replaced every three years, um with no charge to the teacher at all. Their only responsibility is to turn it back in three years and to get another one. You know every teacher in that county has those resources. Um so if the principal has a responsibility to lobby for those things or provide those things then we could use them too. I think a lot of mandates come down from the state. For instance, (name) uh is getting a new set of objectives for art, middle school art. And I guess my next question is is anybody going to go to her and say you know what resources will you need to meet those objectives. And I think that that needs to be a standard procedure. And in a lot of cases we do that but its at the last

minute in the spring uh where people are put under a very tight time crunch to develop those resources and submit what they need and I think we can do a lot more (pause) effective job of that if we plan a little better.

The teachers at Right High also provided insight into strategies that principals could use to provide necessary resources. Kevin observed that principals could be proactive in writing grants and recognizing needs of teachers. “I think ultimately it falls to his responsibility to ask teachers what are the things that you need and then ensure that he has a way to provide them through some account that he may have or through the board of education to solicit funds or maybe even a through grant writing.” Lori explained another role of the principal in securing resources for teachers: “I think that... um ...not only asking the teachers, but being able to assess the situation and figuring out what the teachers need even if they don’t know they need it.”

Barbara, middle school principal, provided her views on how principals address needs for facilities and upkeep of buildings and grounds, which was traditionally, a custodial job. .

I try to work with my... um... supervisor and maintenance staff, the custodial staff even my clerical in maintaining the grounds making sure that um everything is running appropriately. Um.... my assistant principal handles the safety area.... um we do a walkthrough, we walk around to look at the grounds outside the baseball fields. We constantly maintain those because the money adds up when it comes down to maintaining. If the fields go down it costs more to fix them back up versus just maintaining them on a consistent basis. Um and our groundskeeper is pretty good at making sure that depending on the season certain bushes, certain



areas of the land is tended to. Plus our ag department here they work with beautification here on campus so I work heavily with those people making sure the grounds and the facilities is always up to par.

Barbara also mentioned that they “take pride in our floors being very maintained.”

Maintaining facilities and grounds is generally viewed as a source of pride, and strategies for upkeep are traditional and within the means of the school.

Charles, high school principal, also explained his role in maintaining facilities: “... I try to use the thing where I try to move the sand pile every so often. I try to you know ... make sure walls are painted and make sure if we see graffiti on a bathroom wall we immediately get it off so that it doesn’t become the norm. Um I think that is very important.” Clearly, principals want to maintain facilities that teachers can be proud of and want to teach in.

The focus group from Pride Elementary school were impressed with how their administrators stressed having school pride in regards to their facilities and that it is everyone’s role to help maintain the building. How does the principal do that? The major ways principals communicated was through stating clear expectations and modeling the way. Faith stated:

I think she really established with the staff... and with the students’ expectations about the school facilities because there was a few incidences where I think some kindergartners got crazy with some sidewalk chalk on the brick walls and you know she kinda let that message go out to the whole school you know that we are allowed to use sidewalk chalk. It is for the sidewalk and it is for the blacktop you know but this is a beautiful facility school building that has just been

opened and we need to maintain it and do our part. She has gotten over the main speaker and talked to the kids about picking up after themselves in the bathroom and not throwing the paper towels on the floor and so. Being proud. Right being proud of our school. And that is one of the things that they were talking about character education this week on the announcements was school pride. And I think that she really does have from the beginning um sent that message to the staff and to the students about like putting stuff on the walls, using appropriate materials and you know you get fussed at if you mess up the walls (laughs).” Denise stated that “you see her picking up trash.... Mrs. Amanda and all the others. So, she will go and do whatever and she will not ask you to do what she will not do. That kinda motivates you to do an even a better job I think.

Teachers described the principal’s role in maintaining facilities as fundamental to the principalship. One teacher observed, “Well I think the principal’s role is to act in a supervisory position to make sure that the facilities are maintained, work closely with the... um ...custodial staff um and anyone you know who has the responsibility to keep the school clean and in working order.” Another teacher added that the fundamental role should include “swift and firm punishment” for anyone caught vandalizing the building. Another teacher saw the principal’s role as working closely with custodial staff, and he summed by observing, “I think she and the custodial staff working together do an outstanding job of keeping the building clean and neat.”

At the high school level, teachers explained their views of the principal’s role in maintaining facilities and resources. Kevin emphasized the principal’s role, “I think it is the principal’s main job to ensure that we have nice facilities but at the same time also

that we have the people to maintain those facilities. And I think it is his job really as caretaker of the school and the grounds that we have the right people that he empowers the people that are in those positions to maintain the facilities to the best level possible.” Lori echoed her agreement, “um... I agree fully and I think that... uh... uh... support... kinda keeping teachers in check per se by coming by the room, you know making sure that equipment is up and running um quick turnaround time you know if something is not getting done being able to contact someone to get things fixed or uh if something is lacking in the room things like that.”

Jane provided a more specific role of the principal as being the advocate for maintaining facilities. “ I think... I don’t necessarily agree though that it is his job to provide the facilities but I think that he should notify the people who have the power to purchase them for us which I would assume is the board of education or someone working there. I think that he needs to notify them cause they’re the ones that control the money.”

### **Teacher Empowerment.**

#### *You are the expert.*

Teachers feeling valued is very important in maintaining positive working conditions. All of the principals identified one of their major roles as creating conditions in which teachers feel empowered. They did this mainly by establishing teams or committees, providing incentives, and generally acknowledging effectiveness among teachers. Amanda, an elementary principal, explained her role in empowering teachers:

Um, I have first of all I have a school improvement committee that have team reps from all grade levels and I use that not only for our school improvement but also

our leadership team. My first year as principal I had school improvement and a leadership team. Even though I looked at one as more of an academic committee and the other as more of um events and just input. It ended up that I meshed those two committees and I think that's been a positive thing as far as time management. But um even though we go in and we first focus on academics on school improvement then at the end of the meeting we will have some discussions on any concerns they've heard in the building. Things that maybe don't get to me but they hear out and amongst themselves but I should. I also try to let my teachers know that I value them. I refer to them lots of times like you are the expert let me hear what you think. So I think they know I value their opinion their expertise. As I see things throughout the building as I walk around, then I ask those teachers to share or I write them a little note like to say wow this is really good please share at your grade level. Because sometimes they don't know what the teacher next door is doing.

Barbara, middle school principal, explained the advantages of teacher empowerment.

That's one of my major roles here at Quality is to teach empowerment. That deals with my morale. If I don't have a happy teacher, I don't have a happy student body. And you know sometimes people bring home bring to work home situations that may not be conducive to the working environment. And I have to try to disengage that person from those situations that they may bring to work. The teacher empowerment may involve me just saying thank you or it may be just the fact that I asked how your day is going or a smile to just let you know I am thinking and I understand your frustration and I tend to do that on a daily basis

with each of my students and my teachers. Um not saying that you are going to get along with every teacher that you have here but they can never say that Ms. Barbara never said a kind word to them or told them congratulations on this or motivated them to go back to school or this or that. I give an incentive every month to my staff and this month, it's St. Patrick's, so they have a St. Patrick's gift coming. Every month they get a gift from um me and my administrators. So I try to keep empowerment going because I know these times are hard but we got to keep on trudging along but every month they get something.

A major strategy at the high school for creating and maintaining empowerment was holding departmental meetings, more so than full faculty meetings, to provide settings for more involvement for listening and engaging teachers in decision making. Charles summed up his role by stating, "I think my role from the standpoint when we have meetings, in small group meetings not full fledged whole faculty meetings. I know sometimes we have to do that. I'm in favor of having small department meetings that you can um empower teachers to have input and listen to them um cause they all have good ideas. And it doesn't have to be my way. You know there is more than one way to skin a cat so to speak. So um I think that role for me is very important that I must include teachers in decision making and um let them feel that they are needed because they are."

Elementary teachers also expected to be involved in decision making, recognizing the tremendous stress that administrators and teachers both feel in accountability. Faith stated, "Well ...you know the principal and the assistant principal, instructional supervisor, are our leaders and they kinda ...you know ....ultimately this is their school and it is going to come down to them as far as AYP and things like that. Then from

there...you know it's their responsibility to make sure that they have a committee of people to help them make decisions. Like our school improvement team and our school council so involving the faculty and the community in decision making processes."

Another way that principals were viewed in facilitating empowerment as a working condition was by building their own staffs, which helped facilitate trust. One teacher saw the principal's hiring practices as a means to build a culture of empowerment, which can be a powerful working incentive. The teacher observed, "...she can trust her teachers... like... because she helped select her teachers and so she kinda empowers us to... um... make the decisions we need to make for our children instructionally...like I had a student come in from another county that was like way far behind like toward the end of the year and I knew that child was probably going to be retained. I talked to her can I please you know just kinda forget what I am doing with the rest of the class with her and kinda do an individualized program with her and try to get her caught up and she was like yeah absolutely. So you know things like that it is all for the students and she trusts us to make those best decisions for her. She really does."

Evelyn explained how trust facilitates empowerment by observing how principals empower teachers by relating to them as a teacher. "But another thing that she does well at is... especially for y'all... because she taught the younger grades, is (that) she relates even to me as a fifth grade teacher.... she really relates to you like a teacher ...like teacher to teacher um and that is always reassuring. You know the teacher is like... they don't think about us, they don't know what we're doing, they forgot, you know what I mean. You hear those types of stories and she is very good at ...um... I think that is a major source of empowerment is to talk to another teacher like nobody understands you

except for another teacher. And she can talk to you like that, like what do you need, or what are you doing, like totally understand what you are doing, or yes like I agree with you and that is empowering to a teacher to know that she trusts you enough and that she can talk to you like teacher to teacher.”

Another factor of empowerment is risk taking. Principals who allow teachers to take risks and to be less than perfect were viewed as empowering principals. Denise explained it this way:

And she does ...like ...I don't feel like she expects you to be perfect um cause I just get ...um... I started out ...I had eight days at another school in the district and then I ended up being sent here and it was very disturbing and you know she was like I know you are upset about this, you know, and she made me feel like it's ok. I know that you are going to get through this and you know she made me feel better about it ...like... you know sometimes you will have bad days and she doesn't expect perfection and she's very understanding. Um and even I had never met her before I came in here and she you know she always says how did you do this at the other school or how. So even though she didn't know me and she didn't handpick me like she did y'all, she still wants that input and makes you feel like your opinion matters.

Quality Middle School teachers viewed the principal's role in empowerment as one of isolation. When a principal does not micromanage, teachers may see this as empowering. Two teachers described how their principal left them alone and did not try to micromanage. “I've never had one for any length of time in my classroom and say try

this or do this. So I guess I am going on the assumption if I am not hearing anything I must be doing everything ok.”

The major barrier to empowerment is compliance to state tests and mandates. George observed that teachers are not empowered in a lot of ways because of the constraints of the CRCT. One of the teachers insisted, however, that the principal’s role is to provide expectations and then not to interfere. India stated, “I mean they tell us what, but they leave me alone to the how and they do a good job of not interfering.” In other words, teachers understand that principals have little control over state-mandated curriculum, but teachers can be empowered to implement the curriculum if principals do not control how they implement the curriculum.

Teachers at the middle school believed empowerment is also constrained by master schedule development with little teacher input. High school teachers explained how teachers developed a niche and principals allowed them to grow year to year by not reassigning courses and making wholesale changes in the master schedule. Middle school teachers, however, saw many changes in master schedules as within principal’s control—not theirs. One explained, “But the one thing they do have control over is, the principal especially, is determining in middle school, for some reason, they think that if you teach one subject too long, they don’t like it and they want to move you around and I think that is a huge mistake in empowering us. If they don’t leave us alone long enough to get comfortable in the content and then start working with the people that you work with and each year. We can make it better. Then that would give me a lot more power. So there is always that threat hanging over me in May. What am I going to teach next year, what



subject, where are they going to move me. That's what middle school and this school in particular is notorious for that."

In sum, Helen posited that the principal's major role in empowerment was assuming the role of cheerleader and encourager. She stated, "But just being there for you. You know giving you that pat on the back when you are doing something right. You know giving words of encouragement and appreciation." She went on to explain, that empowerment may occur if the principal maintains two-way communication and especially an open door policy. "Having that open door policy. You know giving you the opportunity to come in and talk about any problems or any issues that you may have. And being an advocate for the teacher. Um having the teacher's back as long as the teacher lays everything out and you know what is going on. I can back you if I know what is going on. So just being an advocate and a supporter for the teacher. And having that opportunity to go and talk to them... the principals." All teachers emphasized the need for the principal to acknowledge their work through communication. "If the principal acknowledges, you know I appreciate what you do, thank you, you know wow that was great you know with your club or whatever you did um. Also making the teachers believe in themselves. I think is kinda his job. Helping them believe in themselves, to help them believe that they can do it, that they can improve, or they can try something new."

Right High School teachers also observed the role of principal as communicator as critical to empowerment. One stated, "I think it is the principal's job not only to make sure a teacher is placed in the proper area wherever their strengths are most utilized but also the teacher needs to feel that their ideas, their talents are appreciated. And I think that if the principal can say here is a job that I would like for you to do and I expect you

to do it to the best of your ability. I think giving the teacher the power to assume those duties allows them to even though they may not follow the strict set of guidelines it leaves it open for interpretation. I can get the job done the best I know how.”

### **Leadership.**

#### *Committed to excellence.*

School leadership is a component of working conditions. School leadership is viewed by principals having strategies to encourage collaboration. One way principals create conditions for positive working conditions is to maintain an open door policy. One principal stated, “My door stays open and my teachers don’t have to make an appointment with me. They know that if my door is open, they can certainly walk in. So I think they see leadership as being very open or I hope they do.”

Another strategy principals use to demonstrate strong leadership is to listen to individuals, while at the same time, making decisions for the common good of the school. Barbara, middle school principal, explained it this way. “We do cater to the person, we do listen to what their concerns are and we try to work with the person versus the fact that they are an employee. Um yes I am firm, no they may not like how everything is done, but they have to understand sometimes that it is not for the individual, but it is for the entire organization.”

Building trust is not only critical to empowerment, but it is essential in school leadership. One principal explained how she used the garden metaphorically to build trust and loyalty. She stated, “I tell them (teachers) all the time, “you got to be a part of my garden, I can’t have any snakes in my garden, and I remove snakes out of my garden.” The principal went on to describe how she handled loyalty and trust as being

committed and caring as a team. “And that’s the truth of the matter, and they understand that if you can’t be on my bus, you got to get off the bus. Because we are going somewhere. We are trying to reach a certain goal, and everybody has to have a common goal and that’s for all of our children to be successful as well as each individual staff member. And we aren’t trying to be like crabs and bring everybody down. We are going to work together and its about teamwork.”

The focus group at Pride Elementary School described how leadership is key to all aspects of the school. One teacher stated how leadership “trickles down to every aspect of the school culture. The retention rate of teachers, um behavior from students, um you know teacher morale, um ...I feel like it is just, it touches everything.” It seems that leadership, of all five of the components of working conditions, is most critical to teacher satisfaction. One teacher explained it this way: “Do you want to wake up and come to work? So I feel that it is very important and all of that. But I feel it is a huge part of why you want to come to work and why you don’t ...um ...in a school. Because you know you are shut in your little classroom all day long and so how somebody makes you feel about what you do everyday ...um... it’s really important.”

Faith went on to say, “And you know, I have worked in a lot of schools and ...um... the school setting that I like the best was the one where there was a strong administrator who... um ...like you said... relates to the teachers and the teachers could relate to and um and also have high expectations and communicated those high expectations to the staff and the students. Academically and behaviorally like professionally and all that. Um the schools that I like working at less were the ones where the administrator was less involved and kinda like you know whatever, or just kinda

came in and did their time and wasn't as engaged in the school." In describing how administrators created the positive working condition of leadership, teachers explained that visibility and communicating the vision both through words and actions summed up major leadership functions.

India, in her thoughts about leadership, shared a frustration about school leadership: "Of course it starts at the top and if there is nothing clear up there..... then it comes down to our administration and then it comes down to us and sometimes I feel like just shut the door and let me teach. Because nobody else, I mean nothing else, no one else knows what's going on outside and they don't know where they are going or what they are doing or how they are going to get there. They just keep reacting to situations instead of thinking ahead and being proactive. I would just once like to see a proactive decision...."

The difficulty of the principal's job was noted by Helen. She found it an awesome responsibility to lead and there were some tough moments with the job. She also was aware that the principal had to be the advocate for the school's vision and goals. Helen described the importance of leadership as a working condition, "I think with leadership you got to be consistent. You need to be you know knowledgeable, it's a huge job and something I definitely would not want to do. Because you take a lot of criticism ...you take a lot of heat. And like you said, you gotta to have that destination and you know how to get there in order to guide your staff."

On the topic of principals having vision, Kevin began the discussion in the Right High School focus group. "If the principal isn't confident enough in him or herself. If the principal doesn't have a clear vision of where the school is going, then there is no

leadership. The principal has to understand what the goal is, be able to set goals for the school, but also work within the goals of the board of education to make sure that he is the captain of the ship and make sure he knows where we are headed and make sure he communicates that too.”

Praise is an important strategy of leadership. Teachers described praise as a powerful tool of leadership. George summed up the essence of leadership as being a cheerleader for what everyone ought to be doing: “ Well I guess in all best of possible worlds to me the principal is really the person who provides focus for the faculty. Um you know where maybe we are not doing what all we are supposed to be doing here. And just refocus on that a little bit. And I think a big part of that for lack of a better word is they have to be a cheerleader. Um they’ve got to be upbeat. They’ve got to be positive even when things are you know things are going to go bad around here we know there are. We are not going to get every kid to do everything we want them to do every time. It is not going to happen. And we got to you know give ourselves pats on the back no matter what the test scores are um because we are not raising test takers.”

George then explained how a principal fulfilled the role of cheerleader: He observed a principal in another county do something that he thought to be worthy of mentioning. “ It’s raining, it’s Friday night and it’s cold and wet. The band is walking off the field. He is out there congratulating the kids, the band kids. Anyway he can congratulate the football players later. He is most proud of the band kids than he is the football players. That’s a principal.”

It was noted that there are many other ways in which principals can lead their staffs. Principals can also be effective in leading by influencing their teachers to lead and

expecting the best of leadership from teachers. Jane revealed, “I’ve worked with one principal who has let the teachers basically lead the school. Um... while this principal may have kinda facilitated what was going on, a lot of decisions within the school were left up to the teachers and different committees of teachers and at that particular school I think it was easier for teachers to feel like they were more a part of the decision making process and that they were making a difference where the school and the children’s education was concerned. And then I’ve worked for um another principal who... um ...the administration, or it seemed, makes most of the rules even though most of the rules do make sense. There’s not... It doesn’t seem to be as much teacher involvement. So sometimes I think that leaves teachers in the dark as to why certain decisions are being made. And things that they may be frustrated about where if were just informed or part of the process a little bit more then they wouldn’t feel that way.” Sharing leadership, very similar to empowerment, is a facet of working conditions that emerged as critical to positive working conditions.

### **Professional Development.**

#### ***Do not jump on every bandwagon.***

Professional development is essential for the teachers to acquire the skills needed to reach all types of students. It is important for principals to be vigilant about being observant and recognizing what their teachers need to be successful. However, as a working condition, sometimes teachers feel that professional development is imposed on them. Principals identify the need to recognize areas of growth for teachers. Pride Elementary principal described the responsibility she feels she has related to the topic of professional development. Amanda stated, “I definitely as I told you walking through the

building and seeing, I see sometimes some needs like maybe with some classroom management so I try to provide those opportunities for a teacher. I see some um strengths like somebody doing an awesome job with groups or differentiated instruction so I try to make sure that's a person that we look to, a resource to provide to our teachers. As I look at our test scores, I see areas that maybe we need to have some professional learning in and we've done that with our writing. Our writing scores here were not where they needed to be at Pride so we put in the Write from beginning program, which was done countywide. But we've also emphasized that and let teachers know that hey this is an issue at Pride. Our writing scores sure aren't where we want them to be and we've emphasized that and provided that training. So I try to get the whole big picture and provide the resources for teachers.

Barbara explained how important she believed that professional development is to the strength of the organization not only for teachers but for support staff as well.

We try to provide as much professional development opportunities as possible for our teachers as well as our paraprofessionals. We had a visitor from Ruby Payne last year to come in and talk to our teachers about being on the other side of poverty, trying to understand your students. Um again budget was cut for those things this year, but we have still tried to provide different workshops. Again now this year, the board did maximize workshops for our teachers to attend, so a lot of them got burned out. Um, but they do know if it is something that they want to go to I'm all for it and I will find the resources for them to go.

However, it is noted that the strains of the budgets prevented her from providing as much professional development as she had in the past. But her passion for professional

development was evident, even though she recognized that teachers may burn out from too much whole school professional development.

Charles, the high school principal, along with his instructional supervisor and instructional coach, developed a plan to address an identified need in professional learning. “You know we are having a hard time just as a lot of folks are reaching all students. So we really developed a... um... really took it a point of developing meetings this year on differentiated instruction, maximizing our instructional time.” It was clear that teachers did not have a strong voice in their professional development from this decision.

However, the approach to professional development at the elementary school was a more collaborative effort of teachers and school leaders. The focus group at Pride Elementary explained that administrators always point out to teachers that assessment drives instruction. Faith shared that assessment, data, and test results drove their staff development. “You know our administration looks very carefully at you know CRT, writing assessment, benchmarks and things like that very carefully... and analyze everything. And that leads us to our school improvement plan and that helps us make the decision about our professional development. And I kind of see them as the facilitators of that along with the instructional supervisor.”

Whereas, buy-in is important at Pride Elementary, the teachers were also aware of the reasons for decisions about professional development. They admit that everyone is not going to agree to all that is done. Denise explains the dilemma of professional development as a working condition this way, “They (administrators) always communicate how important it is for everyone to buy into it. You may not agree one



hundred percent, but it is important that as a school and we get on board ...you know ...with the professional development and things like that. And I think they also always encourage learning outside of the school, continual learning.” Principals seem to have a role in building working conditions, and professional development is a critical component of working conditions. In this study, the most disagreement emerged when discussing how principals facilitated professional development.

Everyone is not going to agree with professional development that they are required to attend. India stated, “I resent going to professional development... uh this year about graphic organizers. I mean I’m not supposed to call them that... but that’s what they are. And you know, I think they are doing it to fill squares and to satisfy someone else’s requirements. But how that helps me in my hands-on classroom, I don’t see it. And I don’t have much respect for the people that make me do that. Find something that is going to help me improve in this room.” The conflict that emerged was that between principals’ views of professional development and teachers’ views. One of the Middle school teachers explained that the principal is not responsible for professional development. “It is solely up to individuals to get what they need to be successful in their craft.” Yet, all principals felt responsible for providing school-wide professional development. George explained, “I think it goes back to ...you know ...what’s the saying about in a free society everyone is responsible for their own morale? I think you’ve heard that one. I personally think everybody is responsible for their own personal/professional development. And I think you’ve got to tailor your professional development based on your interest and what you are being asked to teach, and the needs

that arrive from that. And um some more support financially to do that would be appreciated in my book.”

Right High School teachers disagreed to some extent about the principal’s role in professional development. One teacher stated, “He needs to continue to know what teachers need to know to disseminate the information. But I think what is most important is that the principal have a sense of what’s out there, what’s going on, what are the latest trends in education through his own or her own research. And then present that information to the staff so that we are aware of the trends and aware of the things that are going on that will be affecting us or are currently affecting us so that we can be more proactive than reactive to various situations.”

Jane concurred: “I think it’s important for the principal to... um ...like you said... stay up with the latest trends and also not to jump on every bandwagon that comes along because sometimes it seems like every new item that comes out oh we’ve got to jump on it and try this well that may not be what our school needs. It may work for some schools across the county but um we may not fall into that situation so I think it is important to stay up with the trends but be careful not to jump on every bandwagon or else your teachers start to become overwhelmed with all of this new stuff they are trying to do on top of what they are supposed to do in the first place.”

## **Summary of Findings to Research Question 2**

### **Time**

Elementary, middle, and high school principals do what they can to protect instructional time. Providing common planning time for instructional purposes is critical, but planning time also needs to be respected as time for teachers to conduct personal

business during the school day. A few barriers can be overcome if principals plan for substitute teachers, so that teachers do not have to be asked to give up planning time to cover another teacher's class. Having access to the work space beyond normal school hours is also one strategy that a principal can implement to build positive working conditions for teachers. For example, teachers want to be able to go to work in their schools on weekends and during the holidays.

The researcher also found that each school's master schedule reflected common planning time. Written communication, such as daily flyers, also reduced the need for frequent meetings, which teachers viewed as a positive working condition. Email and websites also kept teachers updated on school functions well in advance, which indicated respect for their time.

### **Facilities and Resources**

Having a very clean and well-maintained school is important to teachers and administrators. Teachers expressed that it is important for principals to state and enforce students to respect their schools and have school pride. While elementary school teachers believed they had what resources they needed to teach, some teachers believed principals should take a more proactive role in providing technology resources lacking in schools. The major role of the principal in providing resources is to routinely approach teachers to determine instructional resources they need to do the job. Just being asked is a supportive condition. The principal also plays a major role in knowing what teachers need, even when teachers do not know they need it.

### **Teacher Empowerment**

Overlapping all working conditions, the domain of teacher empowerment was identified by all principals as a major influence on how they approached leadership of the school. Teachers want to teach in schools where they have a voice and have input into decisions that are made. It was evident that principals recognized the importance of motivating, praising, and respecting teachers. State mandates and accountability were viewed as barriers to empowerment. The compliant conditions that were generated based on outside influences of testing were constraints that teachers and principals were working under in all schools. Teacher empowerment was mainly implemented through committee membership within each school.

### **Leadership**

Across all domains of working conditions, leadership of the principal was a powerful domain. Principals and teachers described strong instructional leadership was critical as a working condition. Leadership was found to trickle into the culture of a school. Principals need to communicate a vision, care about faculty and students, and collaborate as a team. Listening skills are important skills in building positive working conditions. Although the principal's job was recognized as a complex one, teachers wanted to work in schools where principals were able to plan and implement a plan. As leaders, principals also need to have skills to engage others in decision making.

### **Professional Development**

All principals and teachers viewed professional development as important to the success of the school and student, but the researcher found some conflict in how professional development should be implemented as a positive working condition. There

appeared to be an abundance of professional development that was required for the teachers during the school year, but school-wide professional development needs to be introduced based on data driven, collaborative decision making. Teachers wanted a voice and input into their own professional development.

### **Research Question #3**

Research Question 3: What are compelling and constraining forces that the principal faces in improving working conditions?

In order to understand how principals maintained working conditions, the researcher investigated barriers to, and challenges of, maintaining working conditions in schools that attract and encourage teachers to remain. To determine these compelling and restraining forces, the researcher studied principal responses to questions concerning teacher complaints and teacher satisfaction. Responses to interview questions about creating better working conditions and people or factors that interfere with that process were also helpful in answering research question 3.

#### **Compelling Forces.**

There are many forces that empower principals in creating conditions for their teachers to be satisfied. The first force that principals described was the governance of the school system. Amanda explained, “...our board... by... you know ...you can pick up the phone and call them just like I told you with (the former principal she worked for). If I am having trouble with a parent or not sure how to answer a question, I just pick up the phone and call her. She listens and gives me some advice. Um, if I have a teacher concerned about something that needs help with human resources, (names the director of personnel) is there. Certainly our Superintendent’s available too and anything

instructional wise (names the Assistant Superintendent) listens to us. They definitely give us the support..... So they definitely provide us with the means and supports for those types to make this a better place.

Middle school principal Barbara felt that the accountability had been a compelling force to help create better working conditions for teachers. Accountability has helped focus work of teachers on needs of students, and teachers are in a better position to identify what they need to do so. Barbara explained, "I think who helps me create better working conditions is the teachers themselves. They tell me what they want and I listen and if I can't give it, then I can give them reasons as to why I can't do it. But the best person to assess the situation comes from the teachers."

Charles also believed that accountability helps create better working conditions in the area of professional development. He saw a major role of principals as staying educated on professional development and motivation of teachers. Accountability has helped clarify roles of teachers and expected performances of teachers. When teachers meet expected performances, satisfaction occurs, and principals have a role to celebrate the performance.

### **Constraining Forces.**

However, there are many deterrents to creating and maintaining working conditions. Principals receive many complaints from various stakeholders, as a negative side of accountability. Parents and teachers feel stress over the important decisions that are made in the name of accountability. The presence of complaints have resulted in principals having to create a school culture where there can be little whining and no excuses. Budget cuts, too, have impacted the school culture. Amanda explained that she

starts the year off on a positive note. “Each year during my pre-planning, I kinda have a little theme I say. This year I told a story about a coach and his desire to be a better leader and he got injured in an accident. Anyway, to make a long story short, in the end he realized that there was no place for no whining, no complaining, no excuses, So I said this year it is going to be tough with the economy so I said let’s try no whining, no complaining, no excuses.”

Charles dealt with the constraining force of complaints by asking teachers who expressed a concern, to also express a solution. One major concern has been “standards-based training that they had to go to and they thought that they were being pulled out of the classroom too much at the beginning of the year when they were establishing their routine and establishing their role with the students.” The conflict between the need for whole-school professional development and the working condition of protecting time for planning for instruction emerged as a major force that principals must deal with in building positive working conditions.

Most of the concerns about working conditions involve teachers’ instructional day. Teachers need parental support and student attendance to feel that they can do their job during the instructional day. Amanda explained, “And of course there some concerns over some complaints about parents as far as not doing what they should do for children.... And then attendance, children who miss too many days of school and the teachers saying I am responsible for their learning and they are not coming to school.” Principals need strategies to encourage both parental involvement and student attendance, if they desire to build positive working conditions for teachers.

Another principal concurred that teachers never have enough time to do their work. “Teachers come to complain about time, and being able to collaborate with each other more and.... the amount of meetings that they have to go to.” However, many of the constraining forces are due to budget cuts and economic conditions. One principal explained that.... “this year the complaints come primarily ...uhh ...lack of money.” At Right High School, Charles observed that many of the constraints in building positive working conditions had to deal with time, but he also observed that teachers were most concerned about students who were not making academic growth. “I would say the most I have complaints about would be about... um uh ...kids, why kids aren’t learning.” Students enter schools ill-prepared for state-mandated curriculum, and the challenge to meet students’ needs is a force that permeates all conditions in the school.

The pressure that teachers are under to meet all students’ needs is a major force in schools in this study. Amanda explained: “I think they (teachers) feel a certain amount of pressure now with AYP and um knowing that we expect their children to meet standards and that I think sometimes teachers go into their careers and not realizing how much work it is. It is hard work and it is not just an 8 hour a day job and they have to be willing to put in that extra time and do their best. And we do have high expectations and maybe the pressure sometimes and finding out that hey this was more work than I thought it would be.”

A major outcome of poor working conditions is stress, when teachers are expected to do more with less in the schools in this study. Barbara observed the prevalence of the impact of budget cuts: “And that is not just here on this campus... it is the entire county and it’s unfortunate because of the money. We don’t have the money to



have subs for every time teachers have been out and so we have to utilize our staff and a lot of them lose a good bit of their planning period.”

Charles saw not micromanaging as a strategy to help in stressful times.

“Micromanagement, I see in other schools teachers leave that particular school and the profession um ...because many times they are treated like the students. They are micromanaged and it's to the point where they don't have the flexibility to be professional and to use their expertise and to use their ideas....” In other words, a counteract to stressful times is to allow teachers to figure out what to do and how to do it. They have potential to be creative, but principals sometimes tighten up in hard, economic times, making decisions for the whole school about how budget shortfalls will impact school procedures. Charles explained, “Um ...that just drives them out. They don't want to be a part of it because they feel like they are just a robot.”

Another factor influencing working conditions is the amount of paperwork that teachers must attend to in their jobs. Amanda observed this overabundance of paper in the service to students with special needs. She elaborated about paperwork in “ interventions with our pyramid, documentation that they must do to show that they are doing effective teaching practices.”

Reform initiatives can be a constraining force in building and maintaining positive working conditions. Schools are in a continuous improvement mode, and many principals see the efforts made to introduce new programs and initiatives. “And I think sometimes it's that we implement a new program and so there is a lot of time and effort put into that and by the time they get that going good and then it's something else. So that they sometimes think everything is thrown at them just like with the standards-based

curriculum, like a new writing program, even though we needed it. It just is a lot to learn at a time. And just like our math instructions changed, and everything the all application and that's a lot like I said, I think sometimes all that that has been thrown at them and sometimes they are like oh one more thing."

Too much improvement at a pace that is unrealistic impacts working conditions in schools. When teacher morale is low, principals worry about the value of a new instructional plan and the breaking point of teachers. One principal stated, "I don't know. Do you ever think if I put one more thing on teachers or tell them one more thing that this might be the straw that breaks the camel's back? So sometimes we have to do that, I am getting a little sense that we are getting a little discouraged or maybe morale is getting low and then I'll say to teachers you've been doing a great job let's do a free jeans day on Friday. I will bring bottle water or something to try to just pick up morale. It doesn't take much. It doesn't take much sometimes."

Charles, the principal of Right High School, believed that principals who assist with creating conditions of parental support and conditions to address student apathy have the best chance to keep teacher morale high. Teachers who feel they are making a difference are more likely to take on more responsibility. But many conditions are beyond the principal's control. Amanda felt that a lot of requirements are out of her control and interfere with her capacity to create better working conditions for her teachers. The School Board, that can be a compelling force to help, can also be a constraining force when they pass policies that require professional development or interfere with school planning periods. Amanda explained, "They are like... ok... we've got to provide this training for our teachers. Our writing scores have got to be improved.

We need a writing program. So they provide all of this but sometimes I think they don't mean ...they don't realize but sometimes just all that on teachers and especially the ones who are so conscientious and they are trying to do everything they can and sometimes all at once can make it very difficult.”

Charles added his input to how interference related to his school. “Um you know the only the only thing that I feel is a real true deterrent is.... um ...(pause) funding from the state for small schools, rural schools like ourselves that don't have the amount of money that other larger systems or systems that are in you know metro areas. For example, if Gwinnett is getting \$8,000 a kid and we are only getting \$4,000 a kid. You know that funding could be used for resources, that funding could be used for support for teachers to create the best learning environment for the kids. We have a good learning environment and I think we do a lot with the dollars that we have but if we work this hard with 4,000 dollars per kid, if we work this hard with \$8,000 per kid. I think that would be very good for our teachers. I think they would get more support. That's a deterrent ....the funding from the state for rural school like ourselves.”

### **Summary of Findings to Research Question 3**

In sum, there are a few factors that assist principals in creating and maintaining working conditions for teachers, while there are many perceived forces that interfere with positive working conditions.

The economy has placed strains on teacher working conditions in schools. Due to the lack of money for substitute teachers, teachers are required to cover for their colleagues during their planning time. As found in the research, planning time for teachers is a great benefit that they do not want to give up.

Student apathy toward school causes strain on the classroom teacher. They are ready to help prepare the students to be productive citizens and they are faced with the “I don’t care attitude” of the students. And parent support is not at the level it needs to be. Teachers get very frustrated when they can’t get responses back from parents.

Attendance is another major concern. Students can’t learn if they are not at school. This puts pressure on the teachers. The community, state and all stakeholders are judging teachers and their ability to teach based on whether or not the school makes AYP. Many factors work against principals best efforts to create positive working conditions.

#### **Summary of Chapter 4**

From studying the major themes and patterns across all research questions, the researcher then identified major findings of the study. The researcher organized the findings into three categories, which focused on the roles of principals in creating and maintaining working conditions.

#### **Principals’ Views of Working Conditions**

The researcher found that principals identified major working conditions that matter to teachers as instructional leadership, including being visible and protecting instructional time; teacher empowerment; and leadership that is student-centered and team-oriented.

#### **Roles of Principals in Creating and Maintaining Working Conditions**

The researcher found that the principals play a major role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools. Major roles include:

- Protect instructional time by handling discipline in a timely and least disruptive manner.
- Be proactive in addressing high expectations for students and motivating reluctant learners.
- Provide common planning time for instructional purposes and respect planning time as personal time for teachers to conduct personal business during the school day.
- Plan for substitutes using a system that does not require teachers to give up planning time.
- Provide safe access to the work place beyond normal school hours.
- Use email and other technology to keep teachers informed and to gather input about decisions in a transparent manner to avoid meetings that require teachers' physical presence.
- Encourage students, faculty, and maintenance staff to respect the school and show school pride in physical facilities.
- Take and make a more proactive stance in providing technology resources teachers need to do their work.
- Approach teachers routinely to determine instructional resources they need to do their jobs and also suggest helpful resources.
- Provide a means for teachers to have a voice and provide input into meaningful decisions.

- Motivate by encouraging, praise by identifying quality work that helps achieve school goals, and generally demonstrate respect for teachers at all times and in all places.
- Build state mandates and accountability systems into school's routines as complementary to other initiatives, so as not to discourage teacher empowerment.
- Communicate a vision, care about faculty and students, and collaborate as a team.
- Listen and engage others in decision making.
- Only introduce the need for school-wide professional development based on data driven explanations and evidence of collaborative decision making.
- Avoid professional development that adds to the teacher workload without teacher commitment.

### **Forces that Impact Roles of Principals in Maintaining Working Conditions**

The researcher found that there are many forces perceived to be working against the role of the principal in maintaining positive working conditions within the school.

Major findings include:

- While the Board of Education (BOE) can be helpful, BOE policies can also interfere with positive working conditions when mandates are perceived as adding to the workload without teacher consultation.

- Budget cuts, the pressure to exceed adequate yearly progress, poor student attendance, lack of parental and community support, and student apathy contribute to lower teacher morale.
- Teachers believe principals play a pivotal role in being more politically proactive and in generating parental and community support for the school.

## CHAPTER 5

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

Working conditions in schools that serve to attract and satisfy teachers have received much attention in the literature in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In an era of the need for high quality teachers, principals seek well-trained educators for the very demanding job of classroom teachers. The literature is clear that principals may retain effective teachers by leading the way in providing working conditions that lead to teacher satisfaction. There has been a litany of research in regards to what teachers have found to be important as far as working conditions. However, not many studies have been conducted to explore the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions. The purpose of this study was to explore the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools in Georgia.

Although the construct of teacher working conditions has many facets, the researcher used the construct identified by North Carolina in statewide surveys to identify the status of working conditions for maintaining high quality teachers. The framework used to define teacher working conditions was from The Governor's Office in North Carolina, which served as the major body in administering a research-based instrument designed to identify and track teachers' responses to working conditions over time. Factors related to five domains were found to create a general climate of professional working conditions within a school setting. These domains were: time, including time to plan, collaborate and provide instruction; facilities and resources, including the availability of instructional materials, technology, office, communication, and school resources; teacher empowerment, including teacher leadership and teacher involvement



in decisions that impact classroom and school practices; school leadership, including the ability of school leadership to create trusting, supportive environments; and professional development, including the availability and quality of learning opportunities for educators to enhance their teaching. In 2009, North Carolina added three other dimensions of working conditions, including managing student conduct, community support and involvement, and instructional practices and support, based on findings from previous years' studies.

For purposes of this qualitative study, the researcher defined *working conditions* as those conditions within a school that impact satisfaction of teachers as they engage in their work, which included domains of use of time, facilities and resources, teacher empowerment, school leadership, and professional development. In several states, including Georgia, Arizona, Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Maine, Alabama, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Illinois and Virginia, teacher working conditions have been studied statewide to determine the relationship of working conditions to student achievement and to teacher attrition. In Georgia 2005 and 2006 studies on time, researchers found that much time is spent outside of the school day grading papers, planning, etc. This finding converged with findings from teacher surveys in other states, in Arizona 2006 and 2007, South Carolina 2004, and Nevada 2006. Georgia educators reported, in the 2005 qualitative study that ineffective leadership could lower morale and influence teacher attrition. From a Georgia 2006 quantitative study, researchers found that leadership is a strong predictor of educators staying or leaving their schools.

As much has been learned about what matters to teachers as far as working conditions in schools, very few studies have explored the principal's role in creating and maintaining the conditions that describe as essential to their productivity and effectiveness. Understanding the views of principals and teachers about the role of the principal may be instrumental in providing the kinds of schools teachers desire to work in and desire to remain in, once employed. As working conditions have been correlated to teacher satisfaction, principals need to delve into their roles to understand how they may contribute to maintaining teacher productivity.

The design of the study was a case study with multiple sites, in which the researcher interviewed three principals, conducted three focus group interviews with teachers, one at elementary, one at middle school, and one in high school, and studied many documents, such as field notes from school improvement plans, minutes of various meetings held within each school, and from observations and school websites. The three school sites were all located in Georgia in Jet School District. The researcher set out to gain insight into principals' roles in maintaining working conditions for teachers. The principalship, a complex and demanding leadership position, tends to be key in all aspects of the school's operation, but maintaining a highly qualified teaching faculty is always near the top of every principal's list. In this chapter, the researcher provided an overview of the study and methods of the study, as well as a discussion of major findings, conclusions of the study, implications of the study, recommendations for future study, and dissemination of the findings of this study.

### **Findings of the Study**

The three rural schools in this study were all within one school system. The elementary school opened in 2006, and the middle school in the study opened in 2002. The high school was over 20 years old. The elementary and high schools were both targeted-assistance Title I schools. The elementary school met AYP since the opening of the school in 2006. The middle school had met AYP every year since their opening in 2002, with the exception of one school term. The high school had met AYP in academic year 2008-09. The elementary, middle and high schools predominantly served White students. Almost one-half of the elementary school students received free and reduced lunches, and more than one-third of the middle school and high schools students were approved for free and reduced lunches. Following the coding of data from transcripts of interviews, document analysis, and reflections from field notes, the researcher identified major themes and studied patterns of the themes to respond to research questions of the study. The three questions of the study were:

1. How do principals identify working conditions?
2. How do principals identify their roles in addressing teacher working conditions in Georgia?
3. What are compelling and constraining forces that the principal faces in improving working conditions?

From studying the major themes and patterns across all research questions, the researcher then identified major findings of the study. The researcher organized the findings into three categories, which focused on the roles of principals in creating and maintaining working conditions.

### **Principals' Views of Working Conditions**

The researcher found that principals identified major working conditions that matter to teachers as instructional leadership, including being visible and protecting instructional time; teacher empowerment; and leadership that is student-centered and team-oriented.

### **Roles of Principals in Creating and Maintaining Working Conditions**

The researcher found that the principals play a major role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools. Major roles include:

- Protect instructional time by handling discipline in a timely and least disruptive manner.
- Be proactive in addressing high expectations for students and motivating reluctant learners.
- Provide common planning time for instructional purposes and respect planning time as personal time for teachers to conduct personal business during the school day.
- Plan for substitutes using a system that does not require teachers to give up planning time.
- Provide safe access to the work place beyond normal school hours.
- Use email and other technology to keep teachers informed and to gather input about decisions in a transparent manner to avoid meetings that require teachers' physical presence.
- Encourage students, faculty, and maintenance staff to respect the school and show school pride in physical facilities.

- Take and make a more proactive stance in providing technology resources teachers need to do their work.
- Approach teachers routinely to determine instructional resources they need to do their jobs and also suggest helpful resources.
- Provide a means for teachers to have a voice and provide input into meaningful decisions.
- Motivate by encouraging, praise by identifying quality work that helps achieve school goals, and generally demonstrate respect for teachers at all times and in all places.
- Build state mandates and accountability systems into school's routines as complementary to other initiatives, so as not to discourage teacher empowerment.
- Communicate a vision, care about faculty and students, and collaborate as a team.
- Listen and engage others in decision making.
- Only introduce the need for school-wide professional development based on data driven explanations and evidence of collaborative decision making.
- Avoid professional development that adds to the teacher workload without teacher commitment.

### **Forces that Impact Roles of Principals in Maintaining Working Conditions**

The researcher found that there are many forces perceived to be working against the role of the principal in maintaining positive working conditions within the school.

Major findings include:

- While the Board of Education (BOE) can be helpful, BOE policies can also interfere with positive working conditions when mandates are perceived as adding to the workload without teacher consultation.
- Budget cuts, the pressure to exceed adequate yearly progress, poor student attendance, lack of parental and community support, and student apathy contribute to low teacher morale.
- Teachers believe principals play a pivotal role in being more politically proactive and in generating parental and community support for the school.

### **Discussion of Findings**

As in previous research, the investigator of this study found that principals play a major role in creating and maintaining working conditions that matter to teachers. The major role that may have an impact on working conditions is the role of a principal as an instructional leader. Teachers appreciate strategies that principals use to protect instructional time, to empower teachers, and to generate a school culture that is student-centered and team-oriented. When a principal performs the functions of instructional leadership, which can be defined as incorporating different leadership behaviors, such as defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school learning climate, teachers are likely to be more satisfied in their roles. The

researcher found that principals view working conditions in terms of school culture, the way in which people work together.

The analyses of data revealed that principals viewed time as very important to the success of teachers and students. Principals who protect instructional time and provide common planning time help create a professional work environment for teachers. Student discipline can be a disruption to the instructional day. Teachers also appreciate principals who have systems in place to deal with students who are interfering with the learning of others.

To delve deeper into the significant role of principals in providing planning time, the researcher found that common planning time for instruction provides a means for collaboration, which is important to teachers. In addition, the researcher found that teachers wish to be treated as professionals, and one of their needs in this regard is to have the option to use planning time to fulfill personal business as well. While district policies may prohibit teachers from conducting personal business during the school day, teachers have a tremendous workload, which often requires work after normal hours. If principals advocate for teacher planning time to be the teacher's time, then teachers appreciate the respect given them to make decisions about the use of their time.

The review of the literature confirmed that time is essential for teachers to be able to do their work to accomplish the goals of the school. Hirsch (2004) found that the time domain had the highest level of dissatisfaction, as teachers reported not enough time to work with mentors, not enough time to collaborate with other teachers, and not enough time to plan for instruction. In addition, the Georgia 2005 and 2006 studies on time reveal

that much time is spent outside of the school day grading papers, planning, etc. Principals have a major role in facilitating time to meet needs of teachers within the school.

Principals have traditionally been responsible for facilities, grounds, and resources that teachers need to do their work. Principals play a major role in making sure that facilities at their schools are clean and pleasant for teachers, students and the community. Schneider (2003) found that the conditions of a school affect teaching and learning. In this study, the principal's role is one which requires him/her to encourage students, faculty, and maintenance staffs to work together to keep buildings and grounds orderly and well-kept.

Resources are vitally important to the principal for the success of the school. The research indicated that teachers need the proper classroom supplies in order for students to be successful in the school environment. Adequate resources are important to support quality teaching in schools (Johnson, 2006). Yet, in this era of budget cuts, principals have to work collaboratively with teachers to decide how budget shortfalls will impact the school. The principal cannot make decisions that impact the instructional day without teacher input.

Collaborative decision making is also a major component of teacher empowerment. Respecting and including teachers in decision making was noted by principals in this study as essential for positive working conditions. The review of literature espouses that "empowering others to make significant decisions is a key goal for leaders when accountability mechanisms include giving a greater voice to community stakeholders" (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 12). Much stress can be alleviated, as teachers in this study recognized that many influences on education are



beyond the control of the principal. How the principal handles external influences within the school, however, can play a major role in sustaining teacher morale during difficult times.

Teachers appreciate strong leadership from the principal, whether it comes in the way they manage discipline or invite community involvement in the school. Principals in this study acknowledged that being visible, listening and genuinely caring about their teachers was very important. The findings converged with the literature which is clear that principals can provide a positive working condition by showing the teachers that they are concerned about their ideas, and giving the teachers positive feedback of how to improve classroom practices (Carlson, 2004). Also noted in the research is that the attitude the school leader portrays will have a great effect on the attitude of faculty and staff (Praisner, 2003).

Professional development is an area where the principals look for ways to increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom. Although teacher productivity can be impacted by school-wide professional learning, principals must involve teachers in decisions about how and when professional learning should work and how it promises to lead to school improvement. “Providing opportunities to improve skills used to teach children has become the essence of professional development” (Mohapatra, 2005, p. 44). However, as the researcher of this study found, principals should introduce the need for school-wide professional development based on data driven explanations and evidence of collaborative decision making.

The domains of time, facilities and resources, teacher empowerment, leadership and professional development have a great impact on teacher working conditions in

schools. The findings of this study generally converged with previous research. The importance of teachers and their need for quality time to fulfill the mission and vision of the school can be recognized and supported by principals who focus on instructional leadership. Teacher empowerment involves principals showing respect for and treating teachers as professionals.

Of all of the domains of working conditions, the leadership domain emerged as very powerful. As supported by the research and the findings, the principal is one of the most important components to a positive working environment. The handbook of strategies to be used in the leadership role of the principal may include a long list, but the principal who desires a faculty who derives satisfaction from their work must employ proven strategies for creating and maintaining positive working conditions.

### **Conclusions**

From the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that:

- The principal is the single most important factor to creating the culture and climate at the schools for positive teacher working conditions.
- The principal can support positive working conditions if s/he employs a strong instructional leadership role.
- The principal who assumes a more proactive role politically has potential to improve working conditions by involving parents and community and political leaders to support teachers.
- Principals who recognize, respect, and build teacher leadership within the school can improve working conditions.

- The principal is responsible for leading the school by articulating a clear vision and mission, which generates a level of satisfaction among teachers.
- Although the principal is a catalyst for ensuring that teachers receive professional development that will impact the needs of the students, the decisions about professional learning should be data driven and relevant to teachers' expressed needs.

### **Implications**

The results of this study may be important to the larger body of research that continues to identify principal roles and strategies to improve the process of instruction, understand principal leadership, retain teachers, and increase student achievement. The findings of this study may also contribute to a deeper understanding of how principals are working to maintain working conditions that have been identified as critical for teacher satisfaction. The roles of principals are complex and challenging within any context of schools, but across all schools, there appears to be consensus about how principals create and maintain positive working conditions.

Local school districts may reflect on the findings of this study to determine how to address teacher working conditions. The study may provide superintendents additional insight into how principals could address the added responsibility of working conditions to their current responsibilities as instructional leaders. This study may also provide insight into how principals can better understand teachers' needs for improved working conditions or appreciation for conditions that are conducive to their work.

The study focused on the factors of the five domains: time, facilities and resources, teacher empowerment, leadership and professional development. Other

domains, such as parental and community involvement and management of student discipline, seem important as working conditions that impact teachers' work. The study could assist a novice principal in understanding what it takes to be an effective leader. The study may provide insight into the responsibilities of the first year principal, and especially for assistant principals who aspire to become principals. The results of this study may add to the existing body of knowledge regarding principals' perceptions of their roles in maintaining working conditions.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the experience gained from this study, the researcher offers three recommendations for future study:

1. As this study focused on three cases in rural schools, more research is needed to examine additional schools that are in other areas, such as urban and/or suburban.
2. In order to analyze data from a large sample, a quantitative study over time, could be used in all states to assess roles principals assume that positively impact working conditions for teachers.
3. While this research focused on five areas of working conditions, it may be useful to determine other domains of working conditions, as teachers identify what is most important in schools from large scale studies.

### **Dissemination**

Principals are responsible for working conditions that facilitate the success of students, realizing that teachers make the most difference in student achievement. Having this knowledge and being an administrator, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure

that the information is disseminated to leaders who can make a difference in the life of a child and provide teachers a positive work environment. The researcher will use the study to guide administrators in the school district in which she works to understand why teacher working conditions are important. Given the opportunity, the researcher may present the research findings at professional conferences, such as the state conference for principals.

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APPENDIX A  
PRINCIPAL'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As an instructional leader, how would you describe your role in supporting teachers? What do you think teachers need from you to do their work?
2. Do teachers come to you with complaints? If so, what is the nature of the majority of complaints? Minority of complaints?
3. The literature says that working conditions are important to teachers. Working conditions may be a satisfier. What do you see as the major working conditions that attract teachers, keep teachers here and happy being here?
4. Working conditions may be a dissatisfier. What do see as far as working conditions that discourages or drives teachers away from teaching, especially here?
5. Describe your role as it relates to providing time for teachers at [Principal's School].
6. What is your role as it relates to facilities and resources at [Principal's School].
7. What is your role as it relates to teacher empowerment at [Principal's School].
8. Describe what leadership looks like at [Principal's School].
9. What do you think others say about your leadership?
10. What is your role as it relates to professional development at [Principal's School]?
11. What do you believe is the major working condition in this school that serves as a major influence on teacher satisfaction?
12. Excluding salary, what working condition do you believe interferes with teacher satisfaction?

13. What or who interferes with your capacity to create better working conditions for teachers?
14. What or who helps you create better working conditions for teachers?



## APPENDIX B

## FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

Thank you for agreeing to be apart of this focus group. Much of the research on teacher working conditions centers on five main factors that teachers find critical to being effective in their jobs. This afternoon, I want to ask you about the factors, but I want you to really discuss them as they relate to the principal's job. I'll listen as you will discuss how your principal creates and maintains teacher working conditions in your school.

1. First question – let's start with a working condition everyone wants – good facilities and resources. How do you view the principal's job as it relates to providing facilities and resources?

2. Second area I want to listen to you discuss is, how you view the principal's job as it relates to teacher empowerment?

3. Now the next area is a very broad area, but we know leadership in schools matter. Much has been written about leadership in schools. So, teachers, how do you view the principal's job as it relates to leadership?

4. The fourth area is a working condition that may be referred to by many names, staff development, professional learning, or just plain professional development. How do you view the principal's job as it relates to professional development? Just discuss whatever comes to mind...as you reflect on your principal and professional development or the ideal principal and ideal professional development or the less than ideal principal and less than ideal professional development.

5. Lastly, we have another broad area. Teachers want time. Time is a factor of good working conditions in schools. Specifically, please discuss how your principal protects, abuses, honors, dishonors, or is just empathetic when it comes to time and teachers in schools.

## APPENDIX C

## PARTICIPATION CONSENT LETTER TO PRINCIPALS




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**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**


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**DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**


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Dear Participant,

My name is Sandra W. Nethels, I am pursuing my doctoral degree in Educational Administration at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. As the principal investigator, I am conducting the research to examine the principal's role in creating and maintaining working conditions in schools in Georgia. To understand the role, I need your help.

The primary intent of this research is to contribute to the understanding of leadership practices that will benefit working conditions in schools. I plan to contribute to the professional literature regarding the role that principal leadership provides in creating and sustaining ideal teacher working conditions in schools. Ultimately, the proposed outcome of this research is to explain challenges and opportunities that principals face in improving teacher working conditions.

While your participation is not required, it is greatly valued, and I hope you will take time from your schedule to share your perspective through the interview process. The interview will be framed by questions, or topics, provided by the principal investigator at your work site. The interview may take approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Only minor risk of personal discomfort may occur while responding to the interview questions, but I will assure your confidentiality by reporting outcomes of interviews by pseudonyms. You do not have to answer any interview questions that you do not want to answer. No schools or individuals will be named in the study. You may withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence by contacting Sandra W. Nethels and declining to be interviewed or ask that your responses not be included in the final study. All responses will remain confidential, and individual respondents will not be personally identified; therefore, no data will be used for purposes other than the study as a result of your participation. Interview tapes will be locked in a file cabinet for three years and later destroyed after the completion of this dissertation. The principal investigator will be the only person with access to the file.

Participants and society will benefit from this research in a broad sense, in that identification of the principal's role in improving teacher working conditions may be identified and ultimately applied in schools. The principal investigator will provide you with access to the study summarizing the findings, upon request.

Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact Sandra W. Nethels at 912.661.3525. ([snethels@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:snethels@georgiasouthern.edu)) or Dr. Barbara Mallory at 912.478.1428 ([bmallory@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:bmallory@georgiasouthern.edu)). For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.



APPENDIX D  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

|   |                         |                      |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 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:** Sandra W. Nethels

**CC:** Charles E. Patterson  
Associate Vice President for Research

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

**Date:** February 23, 2010

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H10231** and titled "**The Principal's Roles in Creating and Maintaining Teacher Working Conditions in Georgia**", 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 **16** 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.*

**This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter.** If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. 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

APPENDIX E  
TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1

*Teacher Demographics*

| School Setting | Teacher | Pseudonym | Description             | Years Experience | Teaching Assignment             |
|----------------|---------|-----------|-------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Elementary     | 1       | Denise    | White Female            | 14               | K                               |
| Elementary     | 2       | Evelyn    | White Female            | 4                | 5                               |
| Elementary     | 3       | Faith     | White Female            | 20               | 1                               |
| Middle         | 1       | George    | White Male              | 21               | Technology                      |
| Middle         | 2       | Helen     | African American Female | 8                | English Language Arts           |
| Middle         | 3       | India     | White Female            | 9.5              | Science                         |
| High           | 1       | Jane      | White Female            | 6                | English Language Arts           |
| High           | 2       | Kevin     | White Male              | 12               | Social Studies                  |
| High           | 3       | Lori      | White Female            | 7                | Graphic Design & Communications |

## APPENDIX F

## PRINCIPAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 2

*Principal Demographics*

| School Setting | Principal   | Pseudonym | Description      | Years Exp |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
| Elem           | Principal 1 | Amanda    | White Female     | 4         |
| Middle         | Principal 2 | Barbara   | African American | 2         |
| High           | Principal 3 | Charles   | White Male       | 4.5       |