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# Sustained Employment of Teachers in High Poverty Schools

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## SUSTAINED EMPLOYMENT IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

by

KAREN J DAVIS

(Under the Direction of Barbara Mallory)

### ABSTRACT

The researcher's purpose of this study was to understand from the lived experiences of teachers in high poverty schools the reasons they remained in these schools. A qualitative method was used to conduct the study, which involved interviews with eight teachers (4 elementary, 2 middle and 2 high), one principal and the Superintendent who responded to open-ended interview questions. The interview questions were designed to elicit responses to the research questions and interview questions. The researcher coded transcripts from the interviews for recurring themes and patterns. Field notes from before and after each interview, as well as district and state documents were used as additional sources of data.

The study gave teachers in high poverty schools a voice to help the researcher understand the challenges these teachers faced, the satisfaction they obtained and the opportunities that allowed for longevity in high poverty schools. Each teacher shared their lived experiences as they related to the reasons they sustained employment in these schools. The principal and the Superintendent also added to the depth to the study by helping the researcher understand the challenges these teachers faced and the opportunities that allowed for longevity.

The research study revealed the teachers in this study faced challenges and difficult working conditions especially in their first year of teaching. Novice teachers in high poverty schools often faced discipline problems, isolation, and a lack of support. However, there were

sources of satisfaction and opportunities that alleviated these challenges. The research study revealed several sources that created satisfaction for teachers. The love for teaching, the need to have a relationship with students, a positive relationship with colleagues and administration, time, better pre service experiences, effective induction programs and more effective recruiting were all findings from the research study that could provide opportunities and improve teacher retention in high poverty schools.

However, relationships were the key finding that emerged from the lived experiences of the teachers in this study. The researcher understood that the relationships between the teacher and the student, the teacher to self, the teacher and their colleagues, and the teacher and their administration were critically important in their experiences and ultimately in their decision to stay. Teachers gained a sense of accomplishment and reward in these relationships and felt they like they were making a difference in these schools. Finally, these teachers felt a sense of loyalty to the students they served and had a sense of self determination where they saw teaching the children as a challenge and were determined not to fail. These teachers were going to teach these children and help remove the obstacles so the students could be educated.

The research study gave an understanding to the issue of teacher retention in high poverty schools and the reasons teachers remain in these schools. School systems should employ time for teachers to build relationships through collaboration and communication. Districts should also implement training in the culture of high poverty schools, student discipline and foster relationship building opportunities for teachers with students and colleagues in high poverty settings.

**INDEX WORDS:** Teacher retention, Teacher attrition, Teachers in high poverty schools, Rewards for teachers in high poverty schools, Challenges in high poverty schools, Opportunities that allow for longevity in high poverty schools, Pre service programs to prepare teachers for high poverty schools, Teacher satisfaction in high poverty schools

SUSTAINED EMPLOYMENT OF TEACHERS IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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SUSTAINED EMPLOYMENT OF TEACHERS IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my children, B.J. and Aimee, my mother, Shirley and the love of my life, Wally. My dream of finishing this project would not have been possible if it were not for the four of you in my life. Each one of you gave me understanding and encouragement in my times of need and kept me motivated and inspired. I love the four of you very much.



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I would like to thank the eight teachers, one principal and the Superintendent who participated in this study. Each of you gave your time and provided valuable information for this research. The insight into your experiences made this study richer.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The teacher is the most significant factor in ensuring the success of students (Rice, 2003). Ingersoll (2004) stated, "...Access to qualified teachers is one of the most important of the educational resources" (p. 3). Owings, Kaplan, Nunnery & Marzano (2006) reinforced the fact that the teacher is the most critical component to student achievement. However, teachers are leaving the field of education at a distressing pace and many are providing lengthy lists of reasons for their departures (Buckley, Schneider & Shang, 2005). Quality of administrators, working conditions, student discipline and teacher preparation were consistent reasons teachers give for leaving the profession (Reynolds, Ross, & Rakow, 2002; Inman & Marlow (2004); Goode, Quartz, Barraza-Lyons and Thomas, 2004; Buckley, et al. (2005).

The literature also revealed that teacher retention rates were not equal in all schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003 & Ingersoll 2001). In fact, retaining teachers had consistently been a larger problem in high poverty schools and less of a problem in more affluent schools. Keller (2007) found in a study in high poverty schools in Illinois that they lost four out of five new teachers within five years and attrition was similar or worse in smaller schools with high populations of poor or minority students. The fact that many of America's classrooms were not staffed with high quality teachers has become a national education problem (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). In addition, it had received national media coverage and been the cornerstone of education reforms and policy initiatives (Ingersoll, 2001).



*No Child Left Behind* established a new age of accountability in which it held states and school systems accountable for student achievement (Shapiro, 2006). The most important factor which impacts student achievement is the teacher. While reasons teachers leave the profession were well-known in the literature, it was less clear why teachers chose to remain in high poverty schools. Generally, if teachers were satisfied with the principal, the school environment facilitated by the principal, and their job environment, then student achievement was affected in a positive direction and teachers would remain (Bogler, 2000; Wong & Wong, 2000). However, more insight into the factors that support teacher longevity, especially in high needs schools was needed. Therefore, the researcher of this study sought to understand reasons for sustained employment of teachers in high poverty schools by interviewing teachers and administrators concerning lived experiences, challenges teachers face and opportunities that facilitate longevity.

### **Background of the Problem**

Educators are struggling to meet the guidelines of *No Child Left Behind* and school systems are faced with the daunting task of ensuring that every teacher is highly qualified and all students achieve in every academic area (Owings et al., 2006). Rice (2003) stressed the most essential dynamic in student achievement was the teacher. Ingersoll (2004) summarized, "...Access to qualified teachers is one of the most important of the educational resources" (p. 3). Finally, Levin (2008) concluded that nothing was more important in a school than dedicated teachers.

Teacher retention had been a topic of media coverage across the United States and had become a nationwide dilemma (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). As a result, it had been the focus of education reforms and policy initiatives (Ingersoll, 2001).

Schools across the United States of America were facing the problem of retention as they continued to lose teachers. The inability to retain teachers became an American crisis. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future observed in their January 2003 report *No Dream Denied: A to America's Children*, "The real school staffing problem is teacher retention. Our inability to support high quality teaching in many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it for other jobs." The picture is clear, "Teacher retention has become a national crisis" (p. 8).

During the next decade, two million new teachers will begin their first day in the classroom but 666,000 will not stay for three years and one million will not remain for five years (The Center for American Progress, 2005). Thornton (2004) & Winans (2005) agreed that between 40% and 50% of all beginning teachers will leave the profession. Thornton (2004) explained, "Multiple studies indicate that nearly 50% of teachers drop out of the profession within the first five years" (p. 5).

The literature revealed a list of reasons why teachers left the field of education but four main reasons continued to emerge. Poor administrative support, student discipline, lack of adequate preparation and working conditions continually topped the list of reasons teachers gave for leaving the field of education (Ingersoll, 2001; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Nelson, 2004; Buckley et al., 2005; Greiner & Smith, 2006. Buckley et al., (2005) confirmed, "Job dissatisfaction, primarily due to poor administrative support, and student discipline is among the most frequent reasons teachers gave for leaving the field" (p.1108). Inman and Marlow (2004) also found that working conditions were one of the main factors that directly affected teacher retention in the United States. The final factor Nelson (2004), Ingersoll (2001), and Greiner &

Smith (2006) found that teacher training programs in higher education were simply not preparing teachers adequately and in large enough numbers.

Darling-Hammond (2003) & Ingersoll (2001) found that there is an inequality in teacher retention rates in schools. In fact, teacher retention is consistently lower in high-poverty schools and higher in more prosperous schools. Retaining new teachers in the high poverty, urban school district of Philadelphia was a significant problem for superintendent Paul Vallas in 2002 where fewer than half of his teachers were staying after three years and only one third were staying in the school they began teaching their first year in the district (Useem & Neild, 2005). Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff (2002) also completed a study on the New York State teachers and found, “Urban districts in particular, have lesser qualified teachers...” (p. 37).

High poverty schools generally have a more challenging teacher retention problem with higher turnover rates in the teacher ranks (Keller, 2007). High poverty schools were defined by Park (2003) as schools where at least half of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch. The complexity of the classroom makes it a difficult place for teachers to be successful (Nelson, 2004). However, Park (2003) explained, “...Work environments in high-poverty or high minority schools face much more challenging working conditions” (P. 17). Physical conditions of schools are also included according to Buckley et al. (2005) as a contributing factor influencing numerous teachers to depart. Many high poverty schools in the United States are old and some buildings may affect the health of the teachers and students (Buckley et al., 2005). Finally, lighting issues as well as heating and air conditioning issues may not be adequate in some schools (Buckley et al., 2005).

Park (2003) continued to explain challenging working conditions in high poverty schools as too much paperwork, student misbehavior, physical conflicts between students, low parental involvement, low salaries, problems with colleagues and lack of instructional materials. Inman & Marlow (2004) also confirmed difficult working conditions as: 1) students who do not behave appropriately, 2) too much paperwork, 3) a large amount of testing mandated by federal and state programs, 4) parents who do not participate in their child's education, 5) low teacher salaries, 6) low administrative support, 7) the amount of conflict in the school and, 8) the opportunities that teachers are given to contribute to making decisions that impact the school. According to Buckley et al. (2005), teachers are also frustrated because they do not have the basic supplies and essential materials to teach the students in their classrooms. Teachers who did not have adequate supplies in their classrooms tend to leave because they became dissatisfied with these challenging circumstances (Buckley et al.).

Although many reasons for teacher attrition were well documented in the literature, researchers had begun to study why teachers remain in the field of education. Johnson & Birkleland, (2003) & Patterson, Collins & Abbott (2004) began to look at the characteristics; beliefs and reasons teachers gave for remaining in education. Several key factors emerged from the literature as to why teachers remain. Teacher preparation programs, comprehensive induction programs, professional development, administrative support, a feeling of success, good working conditions and a sense of belonging with colleagues were other important factors teachers stressed as incentives to remain (Johnson & Birkleland, 2003; Rothschild, 2006; Jacob, 2007 & Ingersoll, 2004). Hammerness (2006) summarized, "Teachers sought supportive administrators,

colleagues who would share advice and feedback, clear expectations for students, and safe, well managed environments” (p. 4).

The literature was clear that teacher recruitment appeared to be one of the most important factors in aiding teacher retention (Boylan & McSwan, 1998). Levin (2008) stated, “Because good teaching is so important, finding and keeping quality educators should be a preoccupation of every school, district, and government involved in education” (p. 223). As a result, many states developed recruitment incentives especially for high poverty schools that are hard to staff. David (2008) explained:

States and districts are experimenting with ways to attract top teachers to schools deemed hardest to staff. Recruitment incentives are designed to entice teachers to work in schools with high concentrations of poor and low-performing students. These incentives, usually financial, may include signing bonuses, loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, and even assistance with relocation and housing costs (p. 84).

However, according to David (2008) recruitment incentives had mixed results in attracting teachers to high poverty schools and less success in helping retain teachers in high poverty schools.

Professional development both before graduation from teacher education programs and after graduation from on the job professional learning was another key component that influences teachers to remain. Some teacher preparation programs had embraced unique partnerships to ensure teachers were ready for the classroom. One best practice teacher preparation program is the use of professional development schools (PDS) (Reynolds et al., 2002). The PDS is a unique partnership between the university and the school system (Reynolds

et al., 2002). Prospective teachers spend a large amount of time in schools and build relationships in the actual learning environment. Reynolds et al., (2002) stated, “PDS graduates felt more satisfied with their preparation than non-PDS graduates did” (p. 289).

Comprehensive induction programs that consistently provided opportunities for continuous professional development based upon the teacher’s individual needs was critical to ensure teachers were successful. Teacher satisfaction and student achievement are bolstered by comprehensive induction programs that provide ongoing professional learning (Patterson et al., 2004). Best practices including professional development schools and comprehensive induction programs ensure teachers are satisfied (Reynolds, et al., 2002). In conclusion, Goode et al., (2004) stated that teachers who are satisfied with their positions are motivated and less likely to leave.

Another major factor identified in the literature that influenced teachers to remain in the field of education was quality administrators (Rothschild, 2006). The administrator must strive to ensure the teacher hired is the perfect fit for the school. The teacher should choose the school and have community participation and integration (Boylan & McSwan, 1998). A prospective teacher, who reflects personal values that transcend teaching and education, is resilient and a problem solver, an opportunist who looks for ways to improve student achievement and ensure the school succeeds should be considered the ideal candidate for employment (Patterson et al., 2004). Even the ideal employee depends upon administrative support in order to succeed (Rothschild, 2006). Teachers value the administrative support received in a school (Rothschild, 2006). Timms, Graham & Caltabiano (2006) found the support of a successful administrator can ensure that teachers are happy and burnout is low. Administrators who promote and encourage teacher ideas

and collaboration among staff ensured that teachers were motivated, inspired and committed (Hammerness, 2006). Timms et al. (2006) and Rothschild (2006) agreed that the leader in a school is a key factor that could greatly improve the conditions for teaching. However, Owens (2004) warned, “That, “just paying attention to people” is not all that is required to motivate people to improve, but it is through empowerment and, “ownership” where true effective change takes place” (p. 354). The leader must constantly strive to engage and motivate the staff while energizing them to accomplish the tasks that must be completed. The staff is then empowered, feel a sense of accomplishment and will remain (Owens, 2004).

Administrators of high poverty schools have a more difficult time recruiting and retaining teachers (David, 2008). In fact, Darling-Hammond (2004) continued to find evidence that teacher retention plagued high poverty, inner city schools at a greater rate than lower poverty schools. Retaining new teachers in the high poverty, urban school district of Philadelphia was a significant problem for superintendent Paul Vallas in 2002 where fewer than half of his teachers were staying after three years and only one third were staying in the school they began teaching their first year in the district (Useem & Neild, 2005). Keller (2007) found that in the inner city of Philadelphia two out of three teachers hired in 1999-2000 were not found to be working there five years later. Finally, David (2008) concluded, “The poorest schools, urban and rural alike, face perennial challenges in attracting [and retaining] enough well-qualified teachers” (p. 84).

In spite of high teacher turnover rates, Hammerness (2006) found teachers remain in high poverty schools with working conditions such as low salaries, too much paperwork, poor administrative support, student discipline, a large amount of testing mandated by federal and state programs, low parental involvement, etc. and they have rarely spoken about the reasons

why they remain in these environments. However, Hammerness (2006) has identified that these teachers had some common characteristics. Hammerness, (2006) found that teachers who remain discussed the gap between the vision and practice. Hammerness (2006) explained, “Teachers who feel that the gap between vision and practice is reasonable and negotiable—who feel that they are making steps toward the vision—described feelings of continued motivation” (p. 3). Several teachers identified that progression toward and commitment to the vision is what kept them going (Hammerness, 2006). However, the focal theme in the research explained that teachers stay because they feel they are making a difference with students and they could not see themselves in any other career (Hammerness, 2006). Teachers stressed that they believed they were influencing student learning and saving one child at a time (Hammerness, 2006). Teacher retention is a national concern and it is important for researchers to understand the compelling forces that drive teachers to remain in their positions in high poverty schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The critical issue of retaining teachers has been covered nationally by the media and remains a cornerstone of education reform and policy initiatives. Teachers today face a variety of complex issues in schools, such as students who do not behave appropriately, inadequate administrative support, difficult working conditions and inadequate preparation. These issues seem to be compounded in high poverty schools. As a result, teacher retention rates are lower in high poverty schools and higher in more prosperous schools. In a few studies researchers have found that sustained employment of effective teachers does occur in high poverty schools, as teachers experience the desire to save the children who populate these schools. Voices of



teachers who remain in high poverty schools, however, have rarely been heard, especially concerning insight into reasons they remain in conditions that have compelled others to depart.

Generally, researchers had identified reasons teachers remained in the teaching profession. Administrative support had been the number one factor to ensure teachers were satisfied to remain in schools. In addition, teachers who participated in the school environment during their preparation programs were more motivated and less likely to depart. Professional development, comprehensive induction programs and good working conditions were other key factors that emerged from the literature as to why teachers remained in the teaching profession. Researchers had completed a few qualitative studies to identify and understand the reasons teachers were giving for remaining in high poverty schools.

While it is known that teachers remained in high poverty schools because they believed they are making a difference in the lives of students, the depth of understanding all of these factors was less clear from the teachers' perspective. The research was very limited and did not provide sufficient depth to address the issue of teacher retention rates, which persist as a problem in high poverty schools. More research was needed to understand why teachers remained in high poverty schools because the teacher was the key factor in student success. Principals and school leaders benefit from understanding the support needed by teachers who work in high stress environments where students of poverty attend school.

Therefore, the researcher of this study sought to understand reasons for sustained employment of teachers in high poverty schools by interviewing teachers and administrators concerning lived experiences and challenges teachers faced and opportunities that facilitated longevity. By conducting this study, the researcher gained an in depth understanding of why

teachers remained in high poverty schools. Improving teacher retention, to ensure every student has a talented and skilled teacher, was worthy of the researchers' attention and focus in the era of school accountability.

### **Research Questions**

Why do teachers remain in high poverty schools?

1. What experiences do teachers describe as a professional in high poverty school?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?
3. What satisfaction do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?
4. What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?

### **Significance of the Study**

Student achievement depends upon the quality of the teacher, yet schools across the United States of America continue to lose teachers. School leaders depend upon their ability to recruit and maintain high quality teachers. However, this task is even more challenging for school leaders in high poverty schools. During the next decade, two million new teachers will begin their first day in the classroom but 666,000 will not stay for three years and one million will not remain for five years. School systems are continually faced with not only the daunting task of ensuring that every teacher is, "highly qualified" as legislated in *No Child Left Behind*, but also ensuring highly qualified teachers remain in the profession. The researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of teachers who remained in high poverty schools and to contribute to practical advice for administrators who attempted to maintain a high quality

teaching force. In fact, the study provided critical information to policy makers as they addressed the issue of teacher retention in high poverty schools.

The researcher in this study was an administrator in Georgia and understood the importance of retaining teachers in high poverty schools. Children must have a highly qualified, highly effective teacher in order to be successful. The most critical factor in student achievement is the teacher. However, the researcher worked in a Georgia district that currently had 30 out of 60 high poverty schools. Children in high poverty schools in this district had as many as two or three teachers in one year due to teacher abandonment. Some classrooms were also filled with long-term substitutes instead of highly qualified certified teachers. Children who have several different teachers or poor teachers may never recover in their educational careers.

This study was of significance because the researcher sought to understand teachers' reasons they remained in high poverty schools by providing the teachers and their principals a voice. The researcher sought to understand from administrators the challenges teachers faced and the conditions that allowed for longevity in these schools. This study provided valuable information to the literature of human resources administration. The researcher planned to share this information at state and national conferences and submit articles for publications in state and national journals. As a result, school administrators nationally had more insight into ways to address the issue of teacher retention in high poverty schools.

### **Research Procedures**

The design of the qualitative study followed the framework of narrative inquiry and the researcher used semi-structured interviews, field notes and state and district documents to understand the lived experiences of teachers who remained in high poverty schools. The role of

the researcher in this study was participant as observer and the research was completed through a thematic analysis. The data collected was used to understand the reasons teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools despite challenges teachers face in these schools. Although teacher dissatisfaction and satisfaction factors had been identified in the literature, the researcher proposed to understand these factors and others that may emerge to add to the study of satisfaction theory concerning teacher longevity in a specific setting, high poverty schools.

Four high poverty schools (two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school) were chosen in Selected School District once the research study was approved by the district and Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board. The four schools were chosen because they were in the same district where policies, resources, and governance was fixed, they provided a representation of teachers in grades k-12 and they were geographically within a four mile radius of one another. A total of ten participants, eight teachers, (two teachers from each school) who had been teaching two or more consecutive years in each school and the principal of the four schools that had the longest tenure at their school and the superintendent of the district, were interviewed to yield data for analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the main source of data collection for this study. Field notes and documents from the state and system were used as other sources of data. The researcher interviewed each teacher with interview questions derived from the research questions. The coding and data analysis was completed once the semi-structured interviews were complete. The researcher also conducted two additional interviews ( the principal from the four high poverty schools who had the longest tenure at the their school and the superintendent) to gain a more detailed understanding of the lived experiences and the challenges these teachers

faced as well the opportunities they had for longevity in these schools. The researcher interviewed the principal and superintendent with interview questions derived from the research questions. The coding and data analysis was completed as the semi-structured interviews were completed.

In order to establish reliability the researcher used the inter-coder method to evaluate the consistency of the coding within all transcripts. In addition, the researcher used the member checking method. Thematic analysis was completed on each transcript. During the coding of the transcripts, a reevaluation process took place on the major codes and sub codes as well as the categories to continually redefine the reasons teachers remained in these schools and the opportunities they had for longevity.

### **Summary**

Researchers had consistently found the teacher is the key essential component to improve student achievement. However, retaining teachers across the United States of America continued to be a nationwide dilemma. The literature yields a lengthy list of reasons teachers leave the field of education, and school systems are struggling to meet the demands of federally mandated laws such as *No Child Left Behind*. Researchers have also consistently found that teacher retention are not equal in all schools. In fact, high poverty schools have lower teacher retention rates than schools of more affluent populations.

This qualitative study attempted to understand why teachers remain in high poverty schools in Selected School District. The teacher turnover rate for some high poverty schools in this district was as high as 60% (Georgia Department of Education Reading First Grant, 2005). The researcher in this study conducted eight semi-structured interviews with teachers. The

researcher also conducted two additional interviews (one with the principal who had the longest tenure in one of the four high poverty schools and the superintendent) to gain a more detailed understanding of the challenges these teachers faced and the opportunities they had for longevity in these schools. The researcher strived to understand the emergent theory of why some teachers remain in these schools. The researcher planned to positively impact the teacher retention problem by sharing the results of this study in Georgia, as well as, nationwide at state and national conferences and submitting articles for publications in state and national professional journals.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future summarized the problem best when they observed in their January 2003 report *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children*, "The real school staffing problem is teacher retention. Our inability to support high quality teaching in many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it for other jobs." The picture is clear, "Teacher retention has become a national crisis" (p. 8). Subsequently the researcher gained insight into compelling forces that influenced teachers to remain in high poverty schools to contribute to the solution of the teacher retention problem.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher provided a review of the literature pertaining to the teaching profession, from choice of the career to denial of the career. First, the researcher presented research findings that identified the reasons teachers chose education as a profession. Next, the researcher then described the complex issue of teacher attrition and explained teacher attrition in high poverty schools, as well as the cost of retaining a workforce within these schools. The researcher then described the complex issue of the issue of teacher retention and why teachers remained in schools, especially high poverty schools. The chapter ended with a description of interventions used to combat teacher retention.

#### **Why Teachers Enter the Profession**

Several key factors had emerged from the literature as to why teachers choose to become educators. Researchers agreed in at least three studies conducted over the last eleven years that the reasons teachers gave for entering the field of education had not changed (Gordon, 1993; Krecic & Grmek, 2005; & Alastuey et al., 2005). Gordon (1993) found specific reasons teachers of color entered education when he interviewed 140 African American teachers in three urban school districts. The key reasons these teachers gave for entering education, according to Gordon (1993), were the influence of other people on their existence, teaching was a calling in their lives, they loved children and teaching and they had previously been involved with youth.

Also, Krecic & Grmek (2005) conducted a study in Maribor, Slovenija of 237 second year education majors and found that these students chose teaching because they had

opportunities to help children and young people, serve the community, have continuous professional development and use their abilities. An additional study done eleven years later by Alastuey, Justice, Weeks & Hardy (2005) with 32 credentialed teacher education graduates from a senior level university echoed the findings of Gordon (1993) and expressed the idea that others had influenced them to become teachers and the fact that they wanted to help students and be a model for them. Teachers generally do not make the judgment to become educators based upon a snap decision (Flatt, 2006). In addition, the financial and time commitments to obtain an educational degree and teacher certification are very demanding. Simon (2005) concluded, "...According to a 2000 study by Public Agenda, [only] one in ten fell into teaching by chance; 96 percent say teaching is something they love to do" (p. 27). However, many teachers who enter the profession because they love teaching are not sustaining employment in education (Pughsley, 2005).

### **Teacher Attrition**

#### **The Teacher Shortage**

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) explained that the ability to keep teachers is the answer to equipping every classroom with highly qualified teachers, and yet a shortage exists in American schools. The shortage is not only a retention problem, as teacher retention is a multifaceted problem and cannot be solved easily. (Ingersoll, 2001). Despite the fact that many teachers choose teaching due to an expressed love for the profession, and accepting that some leave the profession for various reasons, a teacher shortage exists for many reasons (Pughsley, 2005). Darling & Hammond (1997) & Arnold & Massey (2006) stressed that teacher retirement is one factor contributing to teacher shortages. The



National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has continued to gather data on the subject of teacher shortages since 1987. The NCES concluded in a report entitled *Predicting the Need for Newly Hired Teachers in the United States to 2008-2009*, that the increase in student enrollments and the, “graying” of the teaching force will require somewhere between 1.7 and 2.7 million new teachers by 2008-2009 (Arnold-Massey, 2006).

Darling-Hammond (1997) stressed that 50% of the teachers currently in the teaching profession were age 42 or older and 25% were over the age of 50. The trends in current retirement reveal that most of these teachers will retire sometime between the years of 2000-2010 (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Rothschild (2006) stated, “A recent state audit said teacher shortages are expected to grow because many baby boomers are retiring” (p.1).

As teachers retire, it is critical for new teachers to take their place and be retained in the field of education. Pughsley (2005) continued to explain:

...Retirement and increased enrollment account for only a fraction of teacher shortages. Overall, the nation dramatically increased its supply of teachers to meet each year’s new needs. Between the end of the 1999-2000 school year, about 67,000 teachers retired, accounting for only 24 percent of the 278,000 turnover and only 12 percent of the total turnover of 546,000 during that period. Rather, the data [showed] that the demand for new teachers, and subsequent staffing difficulties, are primarily due to pre-retirement teacher turnover (p. 3).

The inability to retain teachers occurs greater on two ends of the continuum. Teachers who are in their first two years of teaching and teachers who are close to retirement tend to have higher attrition rates (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener & Weber, 1997 & Hanushek et al., 2004).

### **The Problem of Teacher Attrition**

Besides retirement and higher student enrollment contributing to the teacher shortage problem, another factor that influences shortages is teachers who leave prematurely or teacher attrition. The national annual percentage rate for all teachers leaving the field of education has been calculated at around 7% by Luekens, Lyter, & Fox (2004) and around 11% by Ingersoll (2001). The teacher attrition trend has continued to increase since 1987 for public school teachers leaving the field of education and only a small percentage of this attrition can be accounted for by retirement (Luekens et al., 2004).

Researchers disagree only slightly about the percentage of new teachers who leave the field of education prematurely but most researchers agree that it ranges between 40% and 50%. Pughsley (2005) continued to elaborate teacher shortages were being created by too many teachers leaving the classrooms within their first five years. Pughsley (2005) explained:

The U. S. reports that over the next decade, more than two million new teachers will walk into a classroom for their first day. Unfortunately, as the National Center for Education Statistics found, 666,000 of those new teachers will leave sometime during the first three years of teaching and one million of them will not make it past five years (p. 1).

Thornton (2004), Winans (2005) & Colgan (2004) also studied teacher shortages and found teachers are leaving the classrooms prematurely. These researchers agree that between 40% and 50% of all beginning teachers will abscond from the profession. Thornton (2004) explained, "Multiple studies indicate that nearly 50% of teachers drop out of the profession within the first five years" (p. 5). The National Center for Education Statistics revealed the fact

that about one-third of America's new teachers will leave the profession sometime during their first three years on the job (Colgan, 2004). Winans (2005) reinforced:

... The federal Schools and Staffing Survey, [covered] 55,000 teachers in 12,000 public schools, and noted a swift-moving, "revolving door" that won't be slowed by recruitment schemes alone. [In addition], U.S. schools lose 40 to 50 percent of their new-teacher cadre in the first five years (p .2).

Inman & Marlow (2004) revealed that most teachers who abandon the field of education have less than ten years of teaching experience. The numbers can be broken down to indicate: with an average of 180 school days in the 1999-2000 academic year, the equivalent of almost 1,600 teachers every day said that they simply could not do this work anymore and left the profession (Flatt, 2006). Many highly educated, extremely qualified, and competent teachers are becoming frustrated and departing the education profession at disturbing rates. Teaching has become a, "revolving door occupation" (Colgan, 2004). A 2003 study by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) concluded that 14% of teachers leave the field in the first year and 46% will leave by the fifth year. Also, Kirby, Naftel, Berends (1999) found women were three times more likely to leave education than men. Education has been characterized as a profession that "eats its young" (Anhorn, 2008 & Osborne, 1992).

Colgan (2004) continued to explain, "Teachers steadily entered the classrooms during the 1990's, but the teacher attrition rate was faster. It was if we were pouring teachers into a bucket with a huge hole in the bottom." Colgan (2004) continued:

What is often seen as a teacher shortage, says the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), is really a teacher retention crisis. The report pointed out

that the number of new teachers entering the classroom increased steadily during the 1990's, but that teacher attrition occurred at a faster rate. The real school staffing problem is teacher retention. Our inability to support high-quality teaching in many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it for other jobs. (p. 23).

Pughsley (2005) concluded that teacher retirement and increasing student enrollments were not the main factors that contributed to the teacher shortages in America. The literature revealed that teacher recruitment would not solve this problem alone. In fact, teachers who leave the field of education prematurely (teacher attrition) are the main culprit and it has become a frightening and alarming crisis (Pughsley, 2005).

### **Factors that Impact Teacher Attrition**

#### **Working Conditions.**

Working conditions was a main factor found by researchers to greatly impact teacher attrition (Darling & Hammond, 2003; Park, 2003 & Watkins, 2005). Working conditions is a general category defined differently by researchers in teacher retention literature. Inman & Marlow, (2004) explained, teachers today face a variety of complex working conditions such as: 1) too much paperwork, 2) a large amount of testing mandated by federal and state programs, 3) parents who do not participate in their child's education, 4) low teacher salaries, 5) the amount of conflict in the school, 6) the opportunities that teachers are given to contribute to making decisions that impact the school, 7) students who do not behave appropriately and 8) low administrative support.

The physical building conditions of schools were also listed as an additional factor according to Buckley et al. (2005) that influenced many teachers as they decide to continue their career in education. Park (2003) stressed that working conditions are on the minds of teachers when they make the decision to stay or leave the classroom. Buckley et al. (2005) found many schools in the United States were old and some buildings may affect the health of the teacher and students (Buckley et al., 2005). Lighting issues as well as heating and air conditioning issues were also not adequate in many schools (Buckley et al., 2005). In addition, Park (2003) found 65% of teachers in high poverty schools said that they did not have adequate resources such as supplies, photocopies and textbooks to complete their work. Teachers who do not have adequate supplies and good working conditions tend to leave because they become dissatisfied with the conditions in the school (Buckley et al., 2005).

### **Student Discipline.**

Student discipline was another significant factor identified by teachers for leaving the classroom (Public Agenda, 2004; NCES, 1997; Feng, 2005 & Kelly, 2004). Whitener et al., (1997) & NCES (1997) completed two studies using SASS and found that student discipline was the number one reason teachers gave for leaving the profession. Smith & Smith (2006) completed a small qualitative study of teachers who had left urban schools and found violence was a major reason why teachers left the schools. Gonzalez (1995) also completed a Texas study and found again student discipline to be a major factor when teachers were considering if they were going to remain in education. Finally, the Council of the City of New York (2004) completed a study of New York City teachers who were thinking of leaving the profession and

stressed safety and student discipline was their number one concern and if this was corrected they would be more likely to stay.

### **Administration.**

Teachers often describe poor administration as another reason they chose to leave education (Whitner, Gruber, Lynch, Tingos, & Fondelier, 1997; Eggen, 2001; Tye & O'Brien, 2002; Patterson, Roehrig, Luft, 2003). Brock and Grady (2005) also noted, "The relationship between teacher and principal is one of major importance in a teacher's work life" (p.168). However, Berry, Wade & Trantham (2008) found, "Teachers and administrators often view teaching and learning condition differently..." (p. 80) and Hope (1999) stressed that the traditional open door policy many administrators have may not be enough to elevate the anxiety of new teachers and as a result teachers may not stay in the classroom.

### **Teacher Attrition in High Poverty Schools**

The inequality of teacher retention between schools of higher socio economic status and lower socio economic status has been documented by researchers. In fact teacher retention has consistently been found to be lower in high-poverty schools and higher in more affluent schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003 & Ingersoll, 2001). High poverty schools were schools defined by Park (2003) as schools where at least half of their student population qualified for free or reduced lunch. Teachers tend to move from schools with more poor, minority and low achieving students (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). McCabe (2008) stressed, "Teachers tend to move toward schools with lower-poverty student populations and higher salaries..." (p. 23). Finally, according to Arnold-Massey (2006), "Poor rural districts typically spend the least [in dollars] and urban districts serving students with multiple needs spend much less [in dollars] than the surrounding

suburbs, where students and families have far fewer challenges” (p. 13). The lack of financial resources negatively influences the ability of rural and urban school districts to retain teachers (Lankford et al., 2002).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) showed that students in high minority schools are 50% more likely to have teachers who are inexperienced or not teaching in a field in which they are certified. Jofus & Maddox-Dolan (2002) stated, “Nationally, classes in high poverty secondary schools are 77% more likely to be assigned an ‘out of field’ teacher—a teacher without experience in the subject they will teach—than classes in ‘low poverty’ schools (where about 15% or fewer qualify for free and reduced-price lunch)” (p. 6). Hanushek et al., (2004) reviewed panel data from the UTD Texas School Project in regards to teacher quality and student performance and also found high poverty and high minority schools are more likely to have students who are taught by inexperienced teachers and are constantly challenged with teacher retention.

Ingersoll (2002) and the U. S. Department of Education, Office of the Deputy Secretary (2004), reiterated the fact that high poverty schools with more disadvantaged students are more likely to have teachers who are not certified or teaching out of field. Tyler (2008) summarized the findings, “[Schools] facing difficulties with teacher recruitment and [retention] are many inner city urban schools in low income, high minority and high poverty neighborhoods districts...” (p. 37).

Colvin (2003) explained:

Poverty unquestionably affects learning, independent of the influence of schools themselves. But a growing body of data shows that the best teachers can do much to

counter those effects. And conversely, weak teachers tend to cause the, “achievement gap” to widen, because impoverished students are not able to seek outside, private tutoring or turn to well-educated parents for help (p. 23).

Nelson (2004) also affirmed, vacant teaching positions are usually found in high poverty, high need schools. Many teachers who begin their teaching careers in high poverty schools will move to schools in the suburbs for better salaries and working conditions once they obtain some experience (Yaskin, 1999 & McCabe, 2008). Van Horn (1999) stressed the faculty turnover rate in inner city schools was a very troubling variable in the success of schools. Van Horn (1999) continued to explain that while working on an inner city school project, the school suffered a 40% turnover rate in one year. Johnson & Birkeland (2003) concluded, “...Schools serving high poverty communities are particularly vulnerable to this revolving-door effect: the repeated loss of teachers and frantic rush to hire new ones” (p. 21).

### **The Cost of Teacher Attrition**

Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff & Wyckoff (2008) found that schools with more non white, high poverty and lower performing students had the least experienced teachers and this created a huge cost for these schools and their students. Brill & McCarty (2008) explained:

Thirty-three percent of teachers leave their schools in the first three years, 46 percent after five years. These high attrition rates result in inexperienced teachers, high economic costs as teachers must be continually hired and trained, and a lack of continuity that makes institutional development and planning difficult (p. 25).

Darling-Hammond (2003) also found that teacher knowledge takes several years to build and a beginning teaching force reduces productivity in teaching and students are not as



successful academically. This is a grave cost for students since the most important factor of student achievement is the teacher (Rice, 2003; Ingersoll, 2004; Owings et al., 2006).

Researchers continue to agree that the teacher is the most critical component to student achievement (Owings et al., 2006) and with teacher attrition the instructional costs for students who receive poor instruction may never be reversed (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Asquith (2007) from an interview with Dr. Harry Wong concluded that high teacher turnover rates create a very difficult situation for the students in high poverty schools.

Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson (2005) defined the organizational costs of teacher attrition as, “the potential loss of a coherent education program, institutional memory, and staff cohesion” (p. 13). Ingersoll (2004) stressed the cause and effect of problems in an organization is the direct result of high teacher turnover rates. Arnold-Massey (2006) continued to explain, “Teacher turnover means districts must recruit again and must repeat teacher induction efforts” (p. 16). According to Arnold-Massey (2006) organizational costs and financial costs are closely related when discussing teacher attrition. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) found that the estimate for urban school districts associated with teacher transfers is \$70,000 per year. In addition, the school system’s central office incurs a cost of about \$8,750 for each teacher who transfers from an urban district. Barnes, Crowe & Schaefer (2007) recently found for districts to hire, recruit, and train the replacement teachers it will cost the United States a staggering \$734,000,000. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) concluded, “These findings make it clear that recruiting and developing high quality teachers and retaining them in every community and at every grade level is critical to providing an equitable education to children across the nation” (p. 2).

## **Teacher Retention**

### **The Problem of Teacher Retention**

Many Americans have begun to realize that teacher retention is a problem that is complex and not fully understood (Ingersoll, 1997). The problem of teacher retention has been researched by Inman & Marlow (2004) & Webb & Vullimay (2004) in an attempt to find a solution. Inman & Marlow (2004) elucidated, “As beginning teachers continue to leave the profession within the first several years of entering, educators must identify factors which cause teachers to remain in the profession...” (p. 1). A major study done by Konanc (1996) completed an analysis of 81,000 North Carolina Public teachers from 1980-1996 and found that the overall loss was between 15% and 18%. An additional study on teacher retention was completed in England and Finland by Webb & Vulliamy (2004). The study was a follow up study involving the problem of teacher retention in six schools in England and six schools in Finland. Webb & Vullimay (2004) concluded, “The critical factors discouraging teachers from remaining in teaching were work intensification, low pay, deteriorating pupil behavior and a decline in public respect” (p. 170).

In the United States, the National Education of Statistics (2007) conducted interviews with 7,000 current and former teachers and found that working conditions, such as materials for students, administrative support and student discipline, topped the list of reasons teachers echoed for their departure. Many researchers have identified poor administrative support, poor student discipline, working conditions and lack of adequate preparation as reasons teachers recite repeatedly as they exit the classrooms (Ingersoll, 2001; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Nelson, 2004; Buckley et al., 2005; Greiner & Smith, 2006 & Kipkowski, 2008).

### **School Demographics and Teacher Retention.**

Teacher retention in high poverty schools is a problem across America (Tyler, 2008). According to the United States Census Bureau (2007) the poverty rate increased for children under the age of 18 to 18%; an increase from 17% in 2006. Children who live in high poverty attend high poverty schools in America and the Education Commission of the States (1999) confirmed schools with a high population of minority and high poverty students are faced with the critical problem of finding an adequate supply of effective teachers who could help promote successful student achievement. Darling-Hammond (2004) continued to find evidence that teacher retention plagued high poverty, inner city schools at a greater rate than lower poverty schools. Retaining new teachers in the high poverty, urban school district of Philadelphia was a significant problem for superintendent Paul Vallas in 2002 where fewer than half of his teachers were staying after three years and only one third were staying in the school they began teaching their first year in the district (Useem & Neild, 2005). Finally, Lankford et al., (2002) completed a study on the New York State teachers and found, “Urban districts in particular, have lesser qualified teachers...” (p. 37).

However, Hammerness (2006) completed a study and found some teachers do remain in high poverty schools and the literature identified some unique characteristics within these teachers such as understanding the difference between vision and practice and the feeling of making a difference with students. Hammerness (2006) explained, “Teachers who feel that the gap between vision and practice is reasonable and negotiable—who feel that they are making steps toward the vision—described feelings of continued motivation” (p. 3). Several teachers identified that progression toward and commitment to the vision is what kept them going

(Hammerness, 2006). However, the focal theme in the research explained that teachers stay because they feel they are making a difference with students and they could not see themselves in any other career. Teachers stressed that they believed they were influencing student learning and saving one child at a time (Hammerness, 2006).

### **Working Conditions that Address Teacher Retention**

In an attempt to retain teachers, a host of factors such as a supportive administration, positive working conditions, teacher recruitment, monetary incentives, professional development and comprehensive induction programs have been identified from the literature as interventions that address teacher retention. Minarik, Thornton & Perreault (2003) stressed, “Highly skilled principals are an absolute essential to the successful operation of a school” (p. 232). Rothschild (2006) reported, “The quality of school leaders is the top reason teachers stay in the profession” (p. 1). Good working conditions that include supplies, good facilitates, a sense of belonging with colleagues, the importance of appropriate class sizes, effective student discipline plans and parental communication are other important factors teachers stressed as interventions that influenced them to remain in education (Rothschild, 2006; Jacob, 2007; Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson & Birkleland, 2003).

### **Administrative Support and School Culture.**

Principal support appears to be the most important component to teachers’ well-being and a critical factor in retaining teachers (Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Rothschild (2006) confirmed this finding in a survey of 21,000 Kansas teachers and stated, “The quality of school leaders is the top reason teachers stay in the profession [and] the leadership factor appears to be the most significant factor in teacher retention” (p. 1). Minarik et al. (2003) concluded, “Highly skilled

principals are an absolute essential to the successful operation of a school” (p. 232) [and], “Teachers stay [because of] the relationship with their principal...” (p. 4).

In fact, Inman & Marlow (2004) completed a study of randomly selected Georgia teachers and stated, “Administrators should focus on continuing to provide all teachers, but particularly beginning teachers, with positive experiences in support of the new ideas they bring to [teaching]...”(p. 612). Hope (1999) affirmed the importance of administrators seeking out new teachers and holding meaningful conversations and creating a climate by which the principal will be a factor in their success or failure.

Principals are responsible for facilitating many roles in the building (Georgia’s Leadership Institute for School Improvement, 2008). Therefore, the leadership in the building has the opportunity to control many of the challenges that will allow for longevity in schools. Singh & Billingsley (1998) indicated, “Principal leadership/support influences commitment...when principals communicate clear expectations, provide fair evaluations and provide assistance and support, teachers experience greater professional commitment” (p. 234). Richards (2005) confirmed these findings when she interviewed 20 teachers and found that teachers value an administrator who holds consistent and high expectations for all members. It is critical for new teachers to become familiar with the culture of the school and the principal’s expectations (Hope, 1999). Watkins (2005) stated a school without high expectations and a strong learning community that collaborates will face large attrition rates. Principals who have high expectations, support teacher learning and collaboration promote a positive school climate (Johnson, et al., 2005). On the other hand, lack of principal support can create an environment of frustration, helplessness, and teacher attrition (Delisio, 2006).

Administrators also have the ability to assign teachers a mentor and provide opportunities for collaboration. Leithwood & Riehl (2003) affirmed that creating shared meetings was at the core of the basic successful leadership practices. Rothschild (2006) completed a study of 21,000 Kansas teachers and found, “The hallmarks of a good leadership climate include trust and respect within the school, fairness in evaluations, open communication and consistent support” (p. 1). Brown (2004) also found in an analysis of the 1999-2000 School Staffing Survey, teachers who collaborate and have positive opinions of the administrators are less likely to leave.

Hall & Tolbert (2005) emphasized the fact that, “In general, research suggests that leaders who are more interpersonally oriented and those who use more participative styles in particular have teachers with higher levels of satisfaction and morale” (p. 114). Richards (2005) reinforced these findings in a qualitative study that consisted of 20 new teacher interviews and found teachers value an administrator who is a motivator and team builder and consistently encourages collaboration. Collaboration, high expectations and a sense of belonging is important to teachers (The Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; Goode et al., 2004; Watkins, 2005; Johnson, 2006 & Williams, 2003). Crippin (2005) discussed servant leadership found in some administrators. Crippin (2005) stated, “A servant-leader is a true humanitarian, puts others before self, caring and compassionate, balanced and one who empowers others and a servant first and then a leader. These leaders according to Crippin (2005) have more positive relationships with their staffs. The teachers in these high poverty schools were also true humanitarians, they put others before themselves, they were caring and compassionate, they were balanced, they empowered their students and they were a servant first.

Working conditions were another factor that must be supported in order for teachers to sustain employment in high poverty school. Darling-Hammond (2003) concluded attention must be paid by administrators to working conditions in order to retain both novice and veteran teachers. Working conditions including student discipline, materials and lack of input in the decision making processes of the school are reasons teachers consistently gave for leaving the field of education and these issues must be addressed to retain teachers. (NCES, 1997); Whitener, Gruber, Lynch, Tingos, & Fondelier, 1997 & Park, 2003).

### **Teacher Recruitment and Monetary Incentives.**

Teacher recruitment and monetary incentives have also been found in the literature as interventions that address teacher retention. According to Useem (2005) successful retention starts with recruiting qualified teachers who will remain in education. As a result, educators are continuing to look at the issue of teacher recruitment in an attempt to strengthen teacher retention. Minarik et al., (2003) explained the importance of school districts recruiting a large and strong teacher candidate pool. School systems have attacked the issue of teacher recruiting in a number of ways. Painter, Haladyna & Hurwitz (2007) explained that some systems are developing recruiting information fliers and distributing them to potential applicants. Other systems are providing an entire On-line application process where potential applicants do not have to leave their computers to apply. The Urban Teacher Collaborative (2000) concluded, “Thirty seven percent of the districts participate in online counseling and/or job-finding services for teacher candidates in which districts can post job openings, requirements and contact information, and encourage candidates to post resumes” (p. 12).

Teacher recruiting efforts, according to the literature, have solved only a small portion of the teacher retention issues especially in hard to staff schools (Berry & Hirsch, 2005). As a result, many states have begun to raise teacher salaries and a few have implemented financial incentives such as sign on bonuses, housing assistance for new teachers and tuition reimbursement to attract and retain teachers in hard to staff schools (Berry & Hirsch, 2005). States such as Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina have offered bonuses to attract teachers to shortage areas (Cornett & Gaines, 2002; Smith, 2003). The city of Philadelphia has also included a \$4,500 hiring bonus to be paid out in two year installments for new teachers being hired, tuition reimbursements of \$2,400 per year for teachers employed in hard to staff schools and pursuing a master's degree and a \$1,000 reward for teachers who recruit new teachers to the system (Useem, 2005).

The literature reveals that all fifty states and the District of Columbia provide monetary incentives for teachers who become Nationally Board Certified (Honawar, 2007). The compensation for teachers varies from state to state and is very expensive. In fact, according to Honawar (2007) the state of South Carolina has spent \$220,000,000 on Nationally Board Certified teachers and plans to spend another \$52,000,000 on Nationally Board Certified teachers in 2008. Finally, Urban Teacher Challenge (2000) found in a 1998-1999 study of 54 Great City School Districts that 8% were offering pay for increased student achievement. David (2008) also found that loan forgiveness was an incentive some teachers found appealing for teaching in high poverty schools.



### **Professional Development.**

Researchers have found another key factor teachers gave for remaining in the field of education was professional development both before graduation and after graduation (Reynolds et al., 2002; Patterson et al., 2004 & Goode et al., 2004). The literature has also revealed that school systems are partnering with colleges and universities close to their districts in an attempt to hire potential candidates from the community (Painter et al., 2007). Some school systems have partnered with new teacher preparation programs to ensure teachers are ready for the classroom. One popular teacher preparation concept is the use of professional development schools (Reynolds et al., 2002). This concept is a unique partnership between the university and the school system (Reynolds et al., 2002).

Prospective teachers spend a large amount of time in schools and build relationships in the actual learning environment. Reynolds et al. (2002) found in a comparative study between Professional Development Schools and Non Professional Development schools that, “PDS graduates felt more satisfied with their preparation than non-PDS graduates did” (p. 289). Lantham & Vogt (2007) also concluded in a longitudinal study of 1,000 recent graduates that, “...Education in a PDS appears to significantly foster graduates’ entry into and persistence in teaching” (p. 153). There is a systematic process that goes on when teacher’s transition from preparing to teach to actually teaching and this process must be nurtured and developed in order for teachers to be successful and remain in teaching (Hope, 1999).

Continuous professional development based upon the teacher’s individual needs is critical to ensure teachers are successful. Patterson et al. (2004) confirmed in a small study of teachers done in Arizona that teacher satisfaction and student achievement are bolstered by

ongoing professional learning based upon the individual needs of the teacher. Goode et al., (2004) surveyed 417 urban educators in their second through sixth years of their careers and concluded that teachers who are satisfied with their positions are motivated and less likely to leave the field. Darling & Hammond (2003) concluded from a longitudinal study of 11 programs that the more training teachers receive the more likely they are to stay.

### **Comprehensive Induction and Mentoring Programs.**

In an attempt to understand the complex problem of teacher retention; researchers have launched a massive investigation into the interventions that allow for longevity in high poverty schools. Comprehensive teacher induction programs have continued to top the list as a possible solution for teacher retention (Goode et al., 2004; Hope, 1999 & McCabe, 2008). These programs provide an intensive support system for teachers and an ongoing professional development growth system (Hope, 1999). McCabe (2008) completed a qualitative study in New York City of 21 participants who taught in New York high poverty schools and now teach in more affluent schools in New York City and stated, “Teachers who have induction support during their first years of teaching are less likely to transfer or leave teaching, especially from high poverty schools” (p. 34). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) stressed, “A comprehensive induction program that includes varying degrees of training, support, and assessment during the teacher’s first years on the job, proves most effective” (p. 5).

These induction programs have several key components such as high quality mentoring, release time to collaborate with their mentors, targeted and on-going professional development, common planning time and a network with other teachers outside of the school setting (The Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). Goode et al., (2004) also stated that numerous studies

have found that participation in professional networks revealed positive results for teachers and increased teacher motivation when teachers were involved in a professional environment.

Watkins (2005) reiterated the three components of a successful induction program are the assignment of a strong coaching mentor, a program that supports and extends practice based upon current research and the implementation of study groups with experienced staff, new teachers and the administration. Johnson (2006) found teachers today place high value on being able to work together and there is a huge pay off for students when teachers collaborate with one another. Williams (2003) continued to find connectedness and autonomy was important to teachers and resulted in job satisfaction.

Ingersoll (2001) completed a data analysis from the Schools and Staffing Survey and its supplement, The Teacher Follow-up Survey and the National Center for Education Statistics and found that teacher retention in high poverty schools that had a mentoring program was 92% higher than schools without a mentoring program. Arnold-Massey (2006) concluded:

Successful induction programs include mentoring and coaching that is individualized to the needs of the teacher, the classrooms, and the subject/level of assignment. They provide continuing assistance and ongoing guidance by an expert in the field, support development of knowledge and skills, provide opportunities for reflection, acculturate the new teacher into the profession and the school, provide opportunities for new teachers to observe and analyze good teaching, and include assessment of the program's value to new teachers and its impact on student learning (p. 22).

The old, "sink or swim" mentality described by Williams (2003) where teachers were in isolation can no longer be allowed to continue because providing comprehensive induction programs are

one way to provide teachers an opportunity that allow for longevity in high poverty schools (The Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; Goode et al., 2004; Watkins, 2005; Johnson, 2006 & Williams, 2003).

### **Summary**

Teachers enter the teaching profession for a variety of reasons and they rarely make the decision to become teachers quickly. In fact, teachers invest a large amount of time and money into their careers (Flatt, 2006) and they provide a list of reasons for why they chose to enter education. Teachers stated that teaching was a way they served the community, helped the young people, used their abilities and showed their love for children. (Krecic & Grmek, 2005 & Hammerness, 2006). Other teachers explained that teaching was a calling in their lives (Gordon, 1993).

Teachers have continuously been found to be the key factor in education (Rice, 2003). Researchers such as Rice (2003) and Owings et al., (2006) have continued to document the impact and importance of the teacher in the classroom. In fact the teacher is the most significant factor in ensuring students are successful. However, teachers are leaving the field of education at alarming numbers and states are scrambling to find incentives to retain teachers in their classrooms (Fowler, 2003 & Rothschild, 2006). Administrative support, student discipline, working conditions and teacher preparation both before and after graduation continue to be the factors that emerge from the literature as why teachers leave the classroom (Ingersoll, 2001; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Nelson, 2004; Buckley et al., 2005; Greiner & Smith, 2006 & Kipkowski, 2008). As a result, states and school districts have implemented a variety of

interventions including better working conditions, embedded professional development, monetary incentives and quality administrators in an attempt to retain teachers.

However, the problem of teacher retention is not easily solved in some schools and school districts in fact; high poverty schools continue to have a harder time retaining teachers than schools with high socio economic populations (Park, 2003). In fact, Thornton (2004) stated, “Multiple studies indicate that nearly 50 percent of teachers drop out of the profession within the first five years” (p. 5). Gatlin & Heilig (2005) elaborated, “As teacher demand has increased and funding inequities have grown over the past 15 years, many urban and poor rural district have hired a growing number of individuals on emergency permits or waivers who lack formal preparation for teaching” (p. 1).

The cost of teacher attrition or teachers who leave prematurely is sometimes irreversible for students (Snow, Burns & Giffin, 1998) and very expensive for school organizations (Arnold-Massey (2006). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) found that the estimate for urban school districts associated with teacher transfers is \$70,000 per year. In addition, the central office incurs another \$8,750 for every teacher who leaves an urban district (Barnes et al., (2007). Due to the very large problem of retaining teachers researchers have identified several key factors that continue to emerge from the literature that can determine whether teachers remain in the classroom or exit and never return again ((Ingersoll, 2001; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Nelson, 2004; Buckley et al., 2005; Greiner & Smith, 2006 & Kipkowski, 2008).

Quality administrators have been found to impact teacher retention. However, in high poverty schools many times the administrators are new to the school or have fewer years of experience than other administrators (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Working

conditions in high poverty schools have been found to be poorer than schools of higher socio economic areas (Buckley, et al., 2005). Student discipline is another reason teachers continually site for leaving and it was the number one reason many New York City teachers left that urban district of low socio economic status (The Council of the City of New York, 2004). Finally, many teachers do not feel prepared to teach in high poverty schools upon entering their careers and the professional development that is provided does not begin to keep the pace of the learning curve in these high poverty environments. Berry & Hirsch (2005) explained, “New teachers entering challenging school environments may need specialized training-pre-service and in-service-to develop the skills to be successful with the students they teach” (p. 7).

The main factors that continually emerge from the literature as why teachers leave education have been clearly documented especially in high poverty schools. However, there are teachers who have been teaching more than two years and they remain in high poverty schools. Hammerness (2006) found that these teachers remain because they feel like they are making a difference with students and saving one student at a time.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Teachers are critical to student success in all schools. The need for sustained employment of quality teachers is essential, as principals and school leaders recognize the benefits of talented and skilled teaching. Student learning is increased, and student growth and development is dependent on effective teaching. However, just as American schools attempt to provide highly qualified teachers in every classroom, teacher attrition is a problem. While researchers have identified reasons for early departures, the literature is less clear on why teachers remain in the profession, especially in schools with high poverty rates. The purpose of this study was to understand lived experiences of teachers who maintained employment in high poverty schools to add to the literature of teacher retention. Four questions guided the study:

#### **Research Questions**

Why do teachers remain in high poverty schools?

1. How do teachers describe their experiences as a professional in high poverty schools?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?
3. What satisfaction do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?
4. What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?

In this chapter, the researcher presented the research methods to be used in this study. The following components were described: research design; research setting; participants; instrument; data collection; and data analysis. A summary of methods concluded the chapter.

## **Research Design**

The researcher conducted a qualitative research study and used thematic analysis to identify findings of the study. The researcher gave teachers a voice and sought to understand why they sustained employment in high poverty schools. According to Boyatzis (1998), Thematic analysis, a process for encoding qualitative information can be thought of as a bridge between the language of qualitative research and the language of quantitative research. This study allowed teachers in high poverty schools to explain their experiences which gave the researcher insight into possible solutions to the problem of teacher attrition.

The basis of this thematic analysis approach was the concept of altruism as a factor in teachers' motivation for remaining in difficult schools. Altruism is a concept used for identifying individuals who are self-sacrificing and directing their concern toward others. According to some theoreticians, altruism is helping others without an external award (Macaulay & Berkowitz, 1970). Hammerness (2006) conducted a qualitative study on teachers who remain in high poverty schools and found that, despite the fact that factors typically known to lead to teacher retention, such as positive experiences with student discipline, professional development, administrative support and working conditions, these teachers remained for very different reasons. Teachers stayed because they believed they were influencing student learning and saving one child at a time (Hammerness, 2006). To add to the understanding of retention of teachers in high poverty schools, the researcher in this study used thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, state and district documents and field notes to understand the context of teachers' experiences that remain in high poverty schools.



## **Settings**

Selected School District had 33,000 students and 5,000 employees. The district had 2,071 teachers teaching kindergarten through grades twelve. The district employed 553 high school teachers, 622 middle school teachers and 896 elementary teachers. Between 2006 and 2010 Selected School District hired 1,070 teachers and retained 835 of those teachers. The teacher retention rate was 78% and the attrition rate was 22%. The district had 59 schools, 56 which were served by Title I. There were 8 high schools, 10 middle schools and 35 elementary schools, two magnet schools, two charter schools and two special schools in the district. The two special schools were an alternative school and a school for children who had severe emotional problems. Percentages in the 56 high poverty schools for free and reduced lunch ranged from approximately 40% to 99%. The student population for Selected School District consisted of approximately 70% African American, 20% White and 5% other.

To select the participants for the study, the researcher identified four schools from which to select the participants. The Title I director was asked to provide a list of all of the schools, their populations, addresses and the percentage of free and reduced lunches in each school within Selected School District. The researcher then separated all 59 schools into three categories. All elementary schools were categorized together, all middle schools were categorized together and all high schools were categorized together. Schools were eliminated if they were not high poverty. The researcher then grouped the schools by the size, level, and geographical location and purposefully selected four high poverty schools that provided a range of sizes and levels and were within a four mile geographical location from one another for this qualitative study. The four schools selected consisted of two high poverty elementary schools,

one high poverty middle school and one high poverty high school. The four selected schools all had poverty rates above 70%, they provided a student population from small to large, they were in the same district where policies, resources, and governance were fixed, they provided a representation of teachers in grades k-12 and they were geographically within a four mile radius of one another.

### **School A.**

School A was a high poverty Title I school that was built in 1963 and had eight additions. The last addition was completed in 2002. The school had approximately 900 students and the student population was 96% African American, 2% white and 2% other. The poverty rate for the school was over 70%. The school had 67 full time teachers and three part time teachers. Thirty four of the teachers had a bachelor's degree, 24 of the teachers had a master's degree, ten of the teachers had an educational specialist degree, one teacher had a doctoral degree and one teacher was not currently certified. The average length of teaching time for the staff was 16 years and the teacher attrition rate was 17% in 2007-2008.

The school had less than 60% of their students meeting or exceeding standards on the Georgia High School Graduation Test. The school had not made adequate yearly progress for the last seven years and was currently in State Directed Status in the state of Georgia. They were currently being monitored by the Georgia Department of Education and were participating with them in a contract to improve student achievement. The school had 2,420 discipline referrals last year. Fifty six of the referrals were for physical and verbal assault, 51 of the referrals were for fighting, ten of the referrals were for drugs, eight of the referrals were weapons possessions involving a knife, three of the referrals were for weapon possession involving a gun, and the

others were for a variety of lesser infractions. The school was also assigned a new principal last year who came from within the system and had previous experience as a middle school principal.

Table 1

*Profile of School A*

School Level	Years of Construction	Student Size	Ethnicity Percentage of Students			Poverty Level	Number of Teachers		Education Level of Teachers			Average Teaching Years	Teacher Attrition Rate	Students MS	Discipline Referrals
			A	C	O		F	P	B	M+	NC				
H	1963	900	96	2	2	70%	67	3	34	35	1	16	17%	60%	2,420

Note: Explanation of terms relating to table. School Level. H = High. Ethnicity of Students. A= African-American; C = Caucasian; O = Other. Number of Teachers. F = Full Time; P = Part Time. Education Level of Teachers. B = Bachelor; M+ = Masters through Doctorate; NC = Not Certified.

**School B.**

School B was a high poverty Title I middle school that was built in 1956 and had three additions since the original construction. The last addition was completed in 1999. School B had approximately 500 students and the student population was 90% African American, 7% white and 3% other. The poverty rate for the school was 86%. The school had 42 full time teachers and no part time teachers. Nineteen of the teachers had a bachelor's degree, 16 of the teachers had a master's degree, six teachers had an educational specialist degree and one teacher had a doctoral degree. The average length of teaching time for the staff was eight years and the teacher attrition rate was 12% in 2007-2008.

The school currently had less than 56% of the students meeting or exceeding state standards on the Georgia Criterion Reference Test. The school had not made adequate yearly progress for more than eight years and was currently in State Directed Status. They were currently being monitored by the Georgia Department of Education and were participating with them in a contract to improve student achievement. School B had 795 discipline referrals during the 2007-2008 school year. Fifty six of the referrals were for physical assault, 40 of the referrals were for fighting, two referrals were for threats and intimidation, one referral was for a weapons possession involving a knife and the other referrals were for a variety of minor infractions. The school also was assigned a new principal two years ago who came from within the system and had previous experience as an elementary school principal.

Table 2

*Profile of School B*

School Level	Years of Construction	Student Size	Ethnicity Percentage of Students			Poverty Level	Number of Teachers		Education Level of Teachers			Average Teaching Years	Teacher Attrition Rate	Students MS	Discipline Referrals
			A	C	O		F	P	B	M+	NC				
M	1956	500	90	7	3	86%	42	0	19	23	0	8	12%	56%	795

Note: Explanation of terms relating to table. School Level. M = Middle. Ethnicity of Students. A= African-American; C = Caucasian; O = Other. Number of Teachers. F = Full Time; P = Part Time. Education Level of Teachers. B = Bachelor; M+ = Masters through Doctorate; NC = Not Certified. Students MS = Student Meeting or Exceeding Standards on State High Stakes Test.

**School C.**

School C was a Title I high poverty elementary school that was built in 1999. School C had approximately 385 children and the student population was 99% African American and 1% white. The poverty rate for the school was 99%. The school had 21 full time teachers and no part time teachers. Nine of the teachers had a bachelor's degree, eight of the teachers had a master's degree, three of the teachers had an educational specialist degree and one teacher had a doctoral degree. The average length of teaching time for the staff was almost 20 years and the teacher attrition rate was 5% for 2007-2008. The school currently had less than 67% of their students meeting or exceeding standards on the Georgia Criterion Reference Test. The school had not made adequate yearly progress for over three years but successfully made adequate yearly progress for the first time in 2008-2009. School C had 220 discipline referrals for 2007-2008 and they were all minor infractions. The school's principal has been at the school for one and a half years.

Table 3

*Profile of School C*

School Level	Years of Construction	Student Size	Ethnicity of Students			Poverty Level	Number of Teachers		Education Level of Teachers			Average Teaching Years	Teacher Attrition Rate	Students MS	Discipline Referrals
			A	C	O		F	P	B	M+	NC				
E	1999	385	99	1	0	99%	21	0	9	21	0	20	5%	67%	220

Note: Explanation of terms relating to table. School Level. E = Elementary. Ethnicity of Students. A= African-American; C = Caucasian; O = Other. Number of Teachers. F = Full Time; P = Part Time. Education Level of Teachers. B = Bachelor; M+ = Masters through Doctorate; NC = Not Certified. Students MS = Student Meeting or Exceeding Standards on State High Stakes Test.

**School D.**

School D was a Title I elementary school that was built in 2001 and had had no additions since the original construction. School D had approximately 500 students and was 97% African American, 1% white and 2% other. The poverty rate for the school was 94%. The school had 36 teachers. Twenty one teachers had a bachelor's degree, 12 teachers had a master's degree and three teachers had an educational specialist degree. The average length of teaching time for the staff was almost 14 years and the teacher attrition rate was 8% for 2007-2008. The school had over 66% of their students meeting or exceeding standards on the Georgia Criterion Reference Test. The school had made adequate yearly progress for more than three years and was considered a Title I Distinguished School. The school had over 80% of their students meeting or exceeding standards on the Georgia Criterion Reference Test in all subject areas at a variety of

grade levels. School D had 257 discipline referrals for the 2007-2008 school year. One hundred and seven of those referrals were for fighting and the other referrals were for minor infractions. The school's principal had been at the school for five years.

Table 4

*Profile of School D*

School Level	Years of Construction	Student Size	Ethnicity Percentage of Students			Poverty Level	Number of Teachers		Education Level of Teachers			Average Teaching Years	Teacher Attrition Rate	Students MS	Discipline Referrals
			A	C	O		F	P	B	M+	NC				
E	2001	500	97	1	2	94%	36	0	21	15	0	14	8%	66%	257

Note: Explanation of terms relating to table. School Level. E = Elementary. Ethnicity of Students. A= African-American; C = Caucasian; O = Other. Number of Teachers. F = Full Time; P = Part Time. Education Level of Teachers. B = Bachelor; M+ = Masters through Doctorate; NC = Not Certified. Students MS = Student Meeting or Exceeding Standards on State High Stakes Test.

The four high poverty schools were selected using the following criteria: (1) above 70% poverty, (2) from small to large in student population, (3) within one district where policies, resources, and governance are fixed; and 4) all were within a four mile geographical location from one another and (5) provide a representation of teachers in kindergarten through grade 12.

**Participants**

To conduct the study, the researcher identified criteria for selecting participants including teachers and a principal in addition to the Superintendent of Selected School District. Three participant groups from the four high poverty schools and the district office were used in this research: (1) teachers with two or more consecutive years of teaching in a high poverty school,

(2) the principal who out of the four high poverty schools had the most consecutive time in their school and (3) the superintendent of Selected School District.

Eight teachers, two teachers from each of the four high poverty schools, were selected to participate in this study. The eight teachers were chosen by the researcher because the participants had been teaching two or more consecutive years in the four high poverty schools and they yielded insight into the reasons teachers remained. The researcher selected the first two teachers on each roster provided by the principal to participate in the study. The superintendent of Selected School District and the principal from the four high poverty schools who had the longest tenure at their school were chosen by the researcher and asked to participate in an interview. They provided insight into the experiences and challenges teachers faced in high poverty schools, and they described the reasons that account for teacher longevity in these schools.

In summary a total of ten participants defined this study, which consisted of two teachers who had taught two or more consecutive years in each of the four high poverty schools, one of the four high poverty principals who had the longest tenure at their school and the superintendent of Selected School District.

### **Instrumentation**

Based upon the research design of this study, semi structured interviews were the main source of data collection. Two standard protocols were used in this research: one for teachers (see Appendix B) and one for the two administrators (see Appendix C & D). The teacher interview protocol (see Appendix B) was designed to understand why teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools. It included two components; the first component was the



informed consent portion of the interview that explained the study, the purpose of the study, what was involved in the study and the risks and benefits of the study. The second component of the protocol was a series of questions based upon the experiences of why these teachers remain in education, what challenges they face in high poverty schools, what satisfaction they obtain in high poverty schools and what opportunities they have that encourages longevity in their schools.

The semi-structured interview questions consisted of detailed oriented probes and clarification probes. The questions were presented exactly as they were outlined in the protocol. The clarification probes were related to the responses given by the participants and used to clarify and expand the information relating to the main questions. Additionally, these probes were used simply to clarify any confusing statements or help the researcher to define any unfamiliar terms and to confirm with the participant the researcher's interpretation of their statements. Follow up questions were also be used by the interviewer to convey the interviewer's interest in the responses given by the interviewee.

The semi-structured interviews were approximately thirty five minutes to one hour in length and audio tape recorded for transcription, coding and data analysis. The interview protocol included the topics of confidentiality, voluntary participation and contacts for questions about the study. Additionally, the informed consent letter gave the participant's permission to continue the research study.

A two part standard protocol was used in the interview with the principal (see Appendix C). The interview protocol (see Appendix C) was designed to understand from the principal why teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools. It included two components; the first component was the informed consent portion of the interview that explained the study, the

purpose of the study, what was involved in the study and the risks and benefits of the study. The second component of the protocol was a series of questions to gain understanding into the administrators' understanding of the experiences of why these teachers remain in education, what challenges they face in high poverty schools, what satisfaction they obtain in high poverty schools and what opportunities they have that encourages longevity in their schools.

The semi-structured interview questions consisted of detailed oriented probes and clarification probes. The questions were presented exactly as they were outlined in the protocol. The clarification probes were related to the responses given by the participants and used to clarify and expand the information relating to the main questions. Additionally, these probes were used simply to clarify any confusing statements or help the researcher to define any unfamiliar terms and to confirm with the participant the researcher's interpretation of their statements. Follow up questions were also be used by the interviewer to convey the interviewer's interest in the responses given by the interviewee.

The semi-structured interviews were approximately thirty five minutes to one hour in length and audio tape recorded for transcription, coding and data analysis. The interview protocol included the topics of confidentiality, voluntary participation and contacts for questions about the study. Additionally, the informed consent letter gave research permission to continue the research study.

A two part standard protocol was used in the interview with the superintendent (see Appendix D). The interview protocol (see Appendix D) was designed to understand from the superintendent why teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools. It included two components; the first component was the informed consent portion of the interview that

explained the study, the purpose of the study, what was involved in the study and the risks and benefits of the study. The second component of the protocol was a series of questions based upon the experiences of why these teachers remain in education, what challenges they face in high poverty schools, what satisfaction they obtain in high poverty schools and what opportunities they have that encourages longevity in their schools.

The semi-structured interview questions consisted of detailed oriented probes and clarification probes. The questions were presented exactly as they were outlined in the protocol. The clarification probes were related to the responses given by the participants and used to clarify and expand the information relating to the main questions. Additionally, these probes were used simply to clarify any confusing statements or help the researcher to define any unfamiliar terms and to confirm with the participant the researcher's interpretation of their statements. Follow up questions were also be used by the interviewer to convey the interviewer's interest in the responses given by the interviewee.

The semi-structured interviews were approximately thirty five minutes to one hour in length and audio tape recorded for transcription, coding and data analysis. The interview protocol included the topics of confidentiality, voluntary participation and contacts for questions about the study. Additionally, the informed consent letter gave researcher permission to continue the research study. Field notes were collected by the researcher before and after each interview and no specific structure was used during the collection. The field notes were used to record the physical working conditions of each school, the interactions between teachers and students, and teachers and other adults. The field notes were also used to record the interactions between the principals and their staffs and the superintendent and his Central Office staff. The Georgia

Report Card produced by the Georgia Department of Education and School Max, and IFAS, the district's student and employee information reports from central office were also used to obtain school profile information. Field notes and state and district documents were used as additional forms of data to complete this research study.

### **Data Collection**

Glesne (2006) stressed that qualitative researchers used many techniques to help organize, classify, and find themes in their data, but they still found ways to make connections that was ultimately meaningful to themselves and the reader. Creswell (2003) pointed out that qualitative research was fundamentally interpretive and therefore allowed the researcher to filter the data through a personal lens. Creswell stated, "One cannot escape the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis" (p. 182).

The method of gathering information for this study was in-depth interviewing of eight teachers (4 elementary, 2 middle and 2 high), one principal and one superintendent. The researcher submitted a proposal for approval to utilize human subjects in the research to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University. The researcher also presented a request to Selected School District for permission to complete the study. After receiving approval from Selected School District and IRB, the researcher then negotiated initial access to the participants through a telephone. These phone calls allowed the participants to ask any questions concerning the study and allowed the researcher to finalize the participant's participation or non-participation in the study. During this phone call, the researcher scheduled the location and time of the interview at the participant's convenience.

The researcher collected field notes before and after each interview. The field notes focused on the physical conditions of the buildings, the interactions between teachers and students, teachers and other colleagues, teachers and administrators, and administrators and staff. Once the field notes before the interviews were collected the researcher then completed the interview at the time and place selected by the participants. The interviews lasted thirty five minutes to one hour and were electronically recorded with the interviewees' prior approval. The researcher followed the interview protocols with the teachers (see Appendix B), the principal (see Appendix C) and the superintendent (see Appendix D) and assured the prospective participants their anonymity would be secured. Glesne (2006) stated, "Participants have a right to expect that when they give you permission to observe or interview, you will protect their confidences and preserve their anonymity" (p. 138). Field notes were collected again by the researcher once the interviews were complete. The field notes continued to focus on the physical conditions of the buildings, the interactions between teachers and students, teachers and other colleagues, teachers and administrators, and administrators and staff.

The audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed, and raw copies of the transcripts were sent to each participant. The participant had the opportunity to reflect on and review the transcriptions to check for accuracy and meaning. The participants were given a ten day period to respond to the researcher if any changes or deletions needed to be made. If no changes or deletions were made, the researcher continued with data analysis. The researcher collected The Georgia Report Card electronically from the Georgia Department of Education. The researcher requested and was provided the School Max and IFAS information from Selected School District's Human Resources office.

## **Data Analysis**

This thematic analysis study was completed to analyze the lived experiences of teachers who sustain employment in high poverty schools. The researcher taped, coded and used thematic analysis continually while referencing and cross referencing the literature as to why teachers remain in high poverty schools. Glesne (2006) explained, “Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned” (p. 147). The semi-structured interviews for the participants were recorded and transcribed and coded by the researcher. Glesne (2006) explained, “Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose” (p. 152).

The researcher used the inductive coding method with all participant interviews and field notes. The researcher first identified the major codes presented in the transcripts. Glesne (2006) explained, “When you work with data gathered through qualitative inquiry, each major code should identify a concept, a central idea...” (p. 153). The researcher made a code book before the coding process of each transcript and field note coding began. The researcher assigned each major code its own number and page (Glesne, 2006). The major codes such as administrative support, student discipline and working conditions were labeled in the code book before the coding process began and then codes were added as they emerged from each set of interviews. As the researcher continued to review the transcript judgments were made about which items were related and sub codes emerged. The researcher assigned below each major code a sub code name, number and explanation for the sub code.

The coding of the transcripts was an analysis process with predetermined major codes and sub codes that emerged about the teachers' experiences and the administrators' beliefs concerning the challenges these teachers face and the opportunities they had for longevity in high poverty schools. During the coding of the transcripts, a reevaluation process took place on both the major codes and sub codes to continually redefine the teachers' reasons they remain in these high poverty schools and the principals' beliefs concerning the challenges these teachers face and the opportunities these teachers have for longevity in these schools.

Once all of the transcripts had been coded, all of the major codes were grouped together and all sub codes were grouped to provide more specific clarity to the data. Any data that contradicted the themes of patterns was analyzed by the researcher to determine if major codes or sub codes should be developed to include the data in the research or whether the data should be considered exceptional data and not relative to the research (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher created a visual table with all major codes, sub codes, themes and major findings (see Appendix E). The researcher then used simple frequency counts to identify patterns. The researcher needed to go back to the transcripts to work and rework the frequency counts taking in to account different experiences. The researcher then identified the major categories and subcategorized that emerged from the patterns. Emergent topics and subtopics were cross referenced by the researcher to existing literature to identify congruent and emergent descriptions of why teachers remain in high poverty schools.

The researcher used memos during the collection and analysis of the data. Analytical memos spelled out the transcription as it moved from major codes and sub codes to pattern codes and from pattern codes to concepts (McCabe, 2008). The memos also showed how the concepts

evolved (McCabe, 2008). The researcher completed memos during the data collection process and while the data was being analyzed (McCabe, 2008).

In order for the researcher to have internal validity in qualitative data the finding must match what is really being said (Merriam, 1998). McCabe (2008) explained, “Viewed in this way, this research is considered to have high levels of internal validity, as the data are coming directly from those who have [the] experience...” (p. 59). The researcher also ensured the ability to separate personal biases from what is really being said by the participants by using two methods. First, the researcher used the member checking method by asking all of the teachers, the principal and the superintendent to evaluate the transcripts to ensure the participants and their ideas were accurate. Glesne (2006) explained, “Member checking-[allows] sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately” (p. 38). Second the researcher recorded and evaluated personal biases throughout the data collection and data analysis portions of the project.

To answer research questions one, two, three and four the researcher coded the semi-structured interviews and the field notes from the eight teacher interviews. Each interview transcript was recorded, transcribed and coded. As the coding of the transcripts progressed, the analysis of all transcripts was completed. The researcher read through each transcript and coded each reoccurring words and phrase, aligning it with major codes and sub codes. The researcher identified phrases that duplicate across transcripts. Major words and phrases were identified and supported by direct quotes from the transcripts.



To answer research questions two and four the researcher coded the semi-structured interviews and field notes from the superintendent and principal interviews. Each interview transcript was recorded, transcribed and coded. As the coding of the transcripts progressed, the analysis of all transcripts was completed. The researcher read through each transcript and coded each reoccurring words and phrase, aligning it with major codes and sub codes. The researcher identified phrases that duplicate across transcripts. Major words and phrases were identified and supported by direct quotes from the transcripts of a summary of indirect evidence of the transcript quotes.

The Report Card produced by the Georgia Department of Education and Selected School District's School Max and IFAS information system reports about the district and the four high poverty schools were used as a final source of data. The documents were analyzed last.

### **Summary**

Schools across the United States of America continue to lose a major asset, their teachers. In fact, in America many citizens see teacher retention as a national crisis. During the next decade, two million new teachers will begin their first day in the classroom but 666,000 will not stay for three years and one million will not remain for five years. As a result, highly qualified teachers were addressed in the *No Child Left behind Act (NCLB)*. NCLB mandated every teacher who was hired after the first day of school in the 2002-2003 school term and teaching in a high poverty school or teaching an academic core content subject had to be highly qualified. School systems are continually faced with the daunting task of ensuring that every teacher is highly qualified and all students achieve in every academic area.

The state of Georgia continues to struggle with retaining teachers in high poverty schools. The teacher turnover rate for some high poverty schools in Selected School District is as high as 60%. Teachers remain in high poverty schools in Selected School District and they have never spoken about the reasons why they remain in these classrooms. The researcher in this study conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with teachers who have sustained employment in high poverty schools to understand their reasons for sustaining employment in these schools despite challenging conditions. The researcher also conducted interviews with other administration (one principal and one superintendent) to understand their beliefs of why teachers continue to sustain employment in these high poverty schools, the challenges these teachers face and the opportunities that allow for longevity.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of teachers who sustain employment in high poverty schools to understand problems of teacher attrition. The qualitative data was collected through semi structured interviews, field notes and state and district documents. The researcher presented findings based on coding in-depth interviews conducted with eight teachers, one principal and one superintendent in one Selected School District in Georgia. State and district documents and field notes from visits to high poverty schools were also used as additional forms of data. The researcher used the qualitative research approach to understand the lived experiences of the teachers who were employed in high poverty schools to explore challenges and compiling reasons that teachers remain in such schools.

The coding of all transcripts, field notes, and state and district documents was an open-ended process where themes concerning teachers' experiences, administrators' beliefs, and conditions emerged to account for teachers continued employment in high poverty schools. In reporting the findings, the researcher organized findings by research question. For research question 1, the investigator of this study coded transcripts of interviews from the eight teacher participants who described their experiences in a high poverty school. First, a demographic profile of each teacher was presented, along with a description of the high poverty school where she worked. Next, a narrative of her experiences was provided that illustrated the themes that emerged from the coding. After all eight narratives and themes were reported, the researcher provided a summary of major and minor themes to report findings to research question 1.

For research question 2, the investigator coded observations from field notes, state and district documents, and interviews with a superintendent, a principal, and eight teacher participants to understand challenges teachers face in high poverty schools. From the coding, six major themes emerged: working conditions; student discipline; negativity from colleagues; conflict with parents; lack of necessary resources; and isolation. The researcher organized the findings by theme and provided a narrative to illustrate the specific theme.

For research question 3, the researcher coded transcripts from eight teacher participants to identify key sources of satisfaction for the teachers in high poverty schools. The findings were reported by major themes that emerged with supporting evidence from teacher interviews. For research question 4, the investigator coded observations from field notes, state and district documents, and interviews with a superintendent, a principal, and eight teacher participants to understand opportunities that exist to alleviate challenges and create conditions for teacher satisfaction in high poverty schools. The researcher reported findings by identifying challenges that emerged, and then describing opportunities and conditions that teachers have in high poverty schools to overcome the challenges. A summary paragraph was presented to respond to the query as to why teachers remain in high poverty schools. Finally, a summary of major findings will conclude the chapter.

The overarching question of the study was the following: Why do teachers remain in high poverty schools? The following four research questions guided the study:

### **Research Questions**

1. How do teachers describe their experiences as a professional in high poverty school?

2. What challenges do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?
3. What satisfaction do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?
4. What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?

### **Professional Experiences in High Poverty Schools**

#### **Research Question 1: How do teachers describe their experiences as professionals in high poverty schools?**

##### **Aimee**

Aimee was a 47 year old African American female who had been teaching elementary students in Selected School District since 1988. She held a master's degree with early childhood and middle grades certification. She had been teaching at school D, a high poverty elementary school for three consecutive years and was currently teaching third grade. School D was a Title I elementary where the poverty rate was 94%. The school had approximately 500 students and 41 teachers. The average length of teaching time for the staff was almost 14 years and the teacher attrition rate was 8%. The school had over 66% of their students meeting or exceeding standards on the Georgia Criterion Reference Test and had 257 discipline referrals for 2008-2009. The school's principal had been at the school for a year and a half.

Challenging student behavior, the love for children, the need to serve and have a relationship with these children as well as positive administrative support were the major themes that emerged from Aimee's experiences. Aimee discussed her experiences with challenging student behavior in her school. Aimee elaborated:

Our kids, see a lot, they see a lot, they know a lot, starting at a very young age, they know a lot, they see a lot and a lot of them are just angry. They're angry because they don't have the life they see on television. I mean, we've seen, I've seen teacher's attacked, verbally and physically. I've seen children who would just assault the teacher than anything...

From Aimee's experiences the themes of love, service and relationships became evident. Aimee loved the children she served every day and she gained rewards from seeing them succeed. Aimee explained:

[I] listen to them because like last week I had jury duty so I was out like Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. I came in on Tuesday morning just to check on them before I went to the courthouse. I had a couple of kids that were in tears because they didn't want me to leave them. [The children said,], "We want you [to stay] because you love us."

Aimee continued:

They're my children; somebody's got to teach them. I've seen my rewards, I've seen the look on their faces when the light bulb comes on, I've seen how they feel when they make good decisions instead of bad. They respond because they know what I expect.

Administrative support was the final theme that emerged from Aimee's experiences. She discussed her administration, "They're supportive, as far as discipline problems, they're supportive as far as getting me things that I need if I let them know that I need it. If it's any way possible for it to be gotten we get it [that means a lot]." The researcher understood from the lived experiences of Aimee that her administration played a role in her ability to teach at this school.

**Elaine**

Elaine was a 63 year old African American female who earned a master's degree in 2007. She had retired from teaching in another Georgia system and then returned to graduate school and earned her master's degree. She had taught fifth and third grades at school D, a high poverty elementary school since 2007. She was certified in special education, elementary and middle grades and was currently teaching third grade. School D had approximately 500 students, 41 teachers and a poverty rate of 94%. The average length of teaching time for the staff was almost 14 years and the teacher attrition rate was 8%. The school had over 66% of their students meeting or exceeding standards on the Georgia Criterion Reference Test and had 257 discipline referrals for 2008-2009. One hundred and seven of those referrals were for fighting and the other referrals were for minor infractions. The school's principal had been at the school for a year and a half.

Two relationship themes (relationship to the students and relationship with Elaine herself) emerged as the researcher coded the transcripts. The relationship with her students, the love for her students and the ability to see them succeed was evident from her experiences. Also, the relationship Elaine had within herself became evident. Elaine also came from a similar background as the students she served and that provided her motivation to continue in teaching. She was selfless and strived on seeing her students' succeed.

Elaine, like Carol, and Frances traced the motivation to teach in a high poverty school back to their own similar experiences. Elaine declared:

I feel obligated and I feel I owe it to these children because I come from similar beginnings, I am a person of color and I do empathize and I see where they are coming

from and I know that they need someone who is willing to take the time. I don't mind giving the time.

The researcher gained a clear understanding of the love between Elaine and her students as well as the commitment and selflessness within Elaine to ensure her students succeed.

Elaine explained:

I let them know that I love them and if you can do that, you have pretty much mastered [the relationship]. I had a problem [last week] and I was in the hospital about three days and I came back and they had all kinds of letters like, "I miss you, don't leave us, we love you." This is the kind of thing that keeps me moving, driving, that's drives me to come back.

Elaine strived to see her students succeed and she felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction once they obtained their goals. Elaine gave to the students but the researcher realized that the students also gave something back to her. Elaine acknowledged:

I've been pleasantly pleased with this group's ability to focus and give you back what you ask in terms of the standards that we are working on today. I will do whatever is necessary such as purchase materials to share this knowledge with them that will transport them to another place where you want them to be. After all, I am 63 years old and I want to stay young as long as I can, they keep me alive and I do feel like they do keep me alive.

Elaine willingness to give emerged from her description of her experiences. Elaine's classroom was filled with teacher made materials as well as books, posters, and other items she had purchased herself. Elaine explained, "...When it comes to supplies and things like that of course



I've always gone into my pocket. The majority of the things that you seen are either handmade or I spent money to purchase them.”

### **Barbara**

Barbara was a 30 year old African American female who just moved to the state of Georgia within the last three years. She taught in another state and transferred to Georgia to be near her family. She had been teaching elementary school for five years, three of those years had been consecutive in school C, a high poverty elementary school, in Selected School District. She had her master's degree and was certified in elementary education. Barbara was teaching third grade. School C had approximately 385 children with a poverty rate of 99%. The school had 21 full time teachers. The average length of teaching time for the staff was almost 20 years and the teacher attrition rate was 5%. The school had less than 67% of their students meeting or exceeding state standards. School C had 220 discipline referrals for 2008-2009 and they were all minor infractions. The school's principal had been at the school for a year and a half.

Several themes became evident from Barbara's experiences. Barbara expressed the difficult conditions in her school with discipline. The evolving themes in Barbara's transcripts were the love for children, the need to serve children, high expectations and the need to see students succeed. However, a key theme that emerged from Barbara's experiences was the relationships with students and other adults who encouraged her to continue in education.

The problem of student discipline quickly emerged as Barbara described her experience: My first year here was a rude awakening. I had some very difficult students who got very physical with me. My first two weeks here, kids were threatening my life. I really thought I can't come here anymore, I can't do it, it's just too much, but I stuck it out 'cause I just

don't like to quit.

The theme of support and encouragement from other adults surfaced as Barbara recalled her experiences. Barbara talked about her family support and the important role it played in keeping her in the classroom. Barbara recalled:

My mom prayed a lot, my sisters prayed, my brother was a cop, he was like, "If you need someone to come down there, I will, I will." I think having a strong family support really helped me a lot during that first year and they got me through.

Barbara's love for teaching and children as well as her need to see students succeed, was evident. Barbara stated:

I love teaching, even though this place is hard, I love teaching, I love the students that I have. I stayed here because I enjoy teaching and I like it here and I got use to the people, I got use to the children and I realized they need someone with high expectations of them and so I stayed for that.

Barbara explained student progress:

...It's taking them from where they are and then seeing the progress that they make.

They might not pass the test at the end of the year, but if I'm seeing them come from like they are reading 30 words a minute and at the end of the year they are reading 90 words a minute. I think that's successful and I am pleased.

Barbara recalled a story about a child who had been difficult in her classroom. Barbara recollected:

When I had a student last year, she's been held back a few times and she came to my

classroom with the world on her shoulders. So I spoke to her many times and conferenced with her many times and she actually started to turn around. At the end of the year, she passed. After two years in the third grade she finally passed her CRCT and she was so excited. She was dancing and telling everybody she was going to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I didn't give up on her. It was difficult. She made it difficult but I didn't give up. I worked with her on what she needed help on. I think letting her know that I cared about her in some way. I think, me not giving up on her. She didn't give up on herself. I think that moved me the most.

The relationship Barbara built with this student showed the power of relationships in high poverty schools. Barbara was committed to this student, loved the child, had high expectations for the student and did not give up until the student was successful.

### **Dianne**

Dianne was a 25 year old Caucasian female who had been teaching at school C, a high poverty elementary school since 2007 when she graduated from college and entered the teaching profession. Dianne obtained a master's degree in 2009 and had been teaching first grade for three years. School C had approximately 385 children with a poverty rate of 99%. The school had 21 full time teachers. The average length of teaching time for the staff was almost 20 years and the teacher attrition rate was 5%. The school had less than 67% of their students meeting or exceeding state standards. School C had 220 discipline referrals for 2008-2009 and they were all minor infractions. The school's principal had been at the school for a year and a half.

The relationship between Dianne and her students and a need to see them exposed to unknown things was evident and emerged quickly. However, the theme of isolation and negative colleague interactions were also very prevalent in Dianne's interview. Dianne explained:

My goals for the students to succeed and learn the material, but also to be able to apply it in their life and a lot of...some material is not applicable to their life at home, but given them those experiences either using you know technology or books to explain historical things or other things they haven't experienced or might never experience so they can go out into the world and be successful. Be able to recall something like, "I've never gone to the beach, but I learned about it in school and so I have a small background about that" and so I want them to be successful in the world and learn how to be citizen and having enough education to be able to participate in the community.

Dianne relived some painful experiences with the researcher of a feeling of total isolation during her first year at school. She discussed the negativity of her colleagues and the feelings of isolation during her first year at school C.

Dianne recalled:

My first year here teachers on my team were telling me to look somewhere else because they felt like I was not cut out for this school. So, it was easy to feel alone and unsuccessful and you feel like your students aren't learning, you feel like you have behavior problems and everyone else had it together. You just feel so isolated.

The researcher understood that even though the first year of Dianne's career was difficult and consumed with a feeling of isolation, the need to help the students encouraged her to stay at school C. Dianne concluded:

These students need help and I might be the only positive influence that they have so, you know everything I felt was against me at times, but I was like, I might be making a difference, that's what kept me here. I feel like I am making a difference.

### **Carol**

Carol was a 43 year old African American female who had been teaching at school A, a high poverty high school since 2007. She had her bachelor's degree and was certified in grades sixth through twelve, in English and Language Arts. School A had approximately 900 children and the poverty rate for the school was 70%. The school had 70 teachers. The average length of teaching time was sixteen years and the teacher attrition rate was 17%. The school had less than 60% of their students meeting or exceeding state standards. The school's principal had been assigned to the school in 2008-2009. School A had 2,420 discipline referrals for 2008-2009 and approximately 128 of those referrals were for major infraction such as weapons, physical assault, fighting and threats and intimidation. The other referrals were for minor infractions.

Challenging student behavior, the love for children, the need to serve and have a relationship with these children, positive administrative support and a sense of support from colleagues were themes that emerged from Carol's experiences. Carol recalled the challenges in student discipline her first year at School A:

I was new here; I came from South Florida, from a magnet school so the kids were pretty much disciplined there and then I came here and I got a reality check. Even

though the magnet school was an inner city school, the discipline was different so when I came here, I just couldn't handle it. I mean, it was like, I was crying every day, I couldn't handle the disrespect and all of that.

Carol loved children and she had a constant need to serve these children and watch them succeed. These themes were clear observations of the researcher. Carol was tutoring a student after school hours. Carol was kind and caring with the student and taking extra time to help the student. Carol stated:

Just like after school, you saw the young lady staying after school, she needed that time and prior to you getting here I explained to her because she did not get it in class, so that's a gap I had to fill for her to understand what I needed her to understand.

Carol's need to serve these children was rooted in her own childhood experiences. Carol declared:

...This is where I'm the most needed. I feel that I'm needed here, it's not that I'm not needed any place else, but being in a high poverty school, I can relate to it because I come from humble beginnings and the school that I came from, it was high poverty and I know that I can succeed in an environment in a high poverty area school, I know they can too.

Carol continually expressed a desire for her to help the students succeed, "Seeing the children exceed or seeing them accomplish something or just to see them smile to know that they got a lesson, or that they understand." Carol continued:

Even though they come to us with deficits if we stay firm as teachers and we believe in them and if we challenge them, they are up for the challenge. Even though they come

with that deficit, it is up to us to get them where they need to be. I feel with myself and because of my love for children, I feel like if that's what my mandate is that's what I need to do.

Carol also experienced support from her colleagues and her administration. Carol discussed her feelings about her colleagues:

They are great people. The ELA department is the type of department where we absolutely refuse to see a lot of us fail. Whenever one needs help, they are there, it's like failing in our department is not an option and so that helps me become better.

Carol's admiration for her administrator and his fair and consistent leadership style was the final theme that emerged. Carol stated, "He's just a leader. I mean if you're wrong, he calls you and if you're right he'll go along with you, you're right and he's for who's right and that makes me respect him."

### **Helen**

Helen was a 33 year old African American female with a master's degree. Helen had been teaching at school A, a high poverty high school since 2005. She taught science and coached the high school girls' basketball team. School A had approximately 900 children with a poverty rate of 70%. The school had 70 teachers. The average length of teaching time was sixteen years and the teacher attrition rate was 17%. The school had less than 60% of their students meeting or exceeding state standards. The school's principal had been assigned to the school in 2008-2009. The school also had 2, 420 discipline referrals in 2008-2009.

Love for children and teaching was evident from Helen's experiences. Helen would smile widely and become excited every time she discussed her students and the love she had for them.

Helen emphasized:

The kids keep me walking in here, because that's my primary reason. It's not the pay.

The kids, their spirit, their resilience despite the things that they go on and I'm a parent to all of them. I don't have discipline problems, never have in my class, whereas you'll have teachers that really go one on one with these kids and this kid might not have had anything to eat this morning or had an argument with his mom. She might have got raped this morning and you're yelling at her. What I do is try to get an understanding with the kids.

### **Frances**

Frances was a 35 year old African American female with a bachelor's degree. Frances had been teaching at school B since 2007 when she was hired there as a first year teacher. School B was a high poverty middle school with approximately 500 students. The school had 42 teachers with an average of eight years of teaching experience for the staff. The teacher attrition rate was 12%. School B had a poverty rate of 86%. The school had less than 56% of their students meeting or exceeding standards. Seven hundred and ninety five discipline referrals were reported for last school year with approximately one hundred reported as serious infractions. The principal had been at the school for two full years and had postponed her doctoral work since she became principal of the school.



The challenge of student discipline was an emergent. Frances described her experiences with discipline:

The different things that we as teachers or faculty members are exposed to. You know, fighting, constantly fighting, disrespect from the students, from the parents. You know, I've never been afraid, they don't scare me, but they scare some people. I think I've only had two students want to fight me.

The love for students, a desire to remove obstacles and help students succeed and a commitment to the job were more prominent themes that emerged. She explained the root of her motivation to serve the students at school B. Frances explained:

Having lived in similar situations as these kids you can't just come in and out, in and out, there is a trust issue there which would, could negatively affect them. So, it's more of looking beyond myself to see who I am influencing and how much do I want to impact their lives positively. You know, just not thinking about myself.

Frances continued:

You know here we have a lot of students who don't come from educated backgrounds and they don't really care if they wind up working at McDonalds for the rest of their life. But, you know, I came from the same background these kids came from and I chose to want something different. And so, in my classroom I say, I'm sorry, but no excuses. You can't let your past dictate your future so you're going to get [what you need] now.

Finally, Frances explained her inner sense of commitment to the job and the contract. Frances stated, "I have a contract so my word means more than anything else."

**Gloria**

Gloria was a 62 year old African American female who had been a middle school teacher since 1996. She was teaching Language Arts and Social Studies. Gloria had a master's degree and had been teaching at school B for 11 years. School B was a high poverty middle school with approximately 500 students. The school had 42 teachers with an average of eight years of teaching experience for the staff. The teacher attrition rate was 12%. School B had a poverty rate of 86%. The school had less than 56% of their students meeting or exceeding standards. Seven hundred and ninety five discipline referrals were reported for last school year with approximately one hundred reported as serious infractions. The principal had been at the school for two full years and had postponed her doctoral work since she became principal of the school.

A relationship theme became apparent as the researcher coded the transcript for Gloria. The strong relationship Gloria had with her colleagues and her administration was evident. Gloria stated:

I enjoy my colleagues and they pick up the slack and I pick up the slack for them like I had to come in here and they take my kids or if I have to go home early. I thoroughly enjoy them because they are very helpful. You have support. Mr. J our assistant principal is a person I could not do without. He handles all of the discipline and Mrs. B our principal is very easy to talk to and she is understanding. I've never heard her raise her voice.

Gloria's feeling of making a difference with her students and the feeling of accomplishment when they succeeded also materialized as themes.

Gloria explained:

You [are] a parent, you [are] a nurse.[You are] trying to make a difference in one child's life every year, to see them in advance, to know that they won't be caught up in the same cycle over and over again. Seeing or hearing my kids have graduated and they are going to college and it's just a good feeling that some do go on and make it. That makes me happy.

Table 5

*Profile of Participants*

Respondent	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Degree	Level of School	Size of School
Aimee	47	F	A	M	E	500
Elaine	63	F	A	M	E	500
Barbara	30	F	A	M	E	385
Dianne	25	F	C	M	E	385
Carol	44	F	A	B	H	900
Helen	33	F	A	M	H	900
Frances	35	F	A	B	M	500
Gloria	62	F	A	M	M	500

Note: Explanation of terms relating to table. Ethnicity of Respondent: C = Caucasian; A = African-American. Degree of Respondent: B = Bachelor; M = Masters Degree. Level of School: E = Elementary; M = Middle; H = High.

Table 6

*Ethnicity of Teachers*

Ethnic groups	N=8	Percentage
African-American	7	90.0%
Hispanic	0	00.0%
Caucasian	1	10.0%

Table 7

*Age of Teachers*

Age Range	N=8	Percentage
Under 30	1	8.0%
30-39	3	42.0%
40-49	2	25.0%
50-59	0	00.0%
60-69	2	25.0%

Table 8

*Gender of Teachers*

Gender Group	N=8	Percentage
Male	0	00.0%
Female	8	100.0%

Table 9

*Teachers' Highest Degree*


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Gender Group	N=8	Percentage
Bachelors	2	25.0%
Masters	6	75.0%

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### Summary of Findings

#### **Research Question 1: How do teachers describe their experiences as a professional in high poverty schools?**

Several major themes emerged from the professional experiences of the participants in this study. The teacher as a servant to meet the needs of their students was a major theme. All eight teachers reflected on their positive professional experiences in these schools in relationship to the students they serve. The teachers' need to serve these children was discussed 25 times in eight transcripts. These teachers also recalled time and time again how they were destined to meet these children where they were and help them succeed. All eight teachers recalled a total of 27 times in eight transcripts how important it was for them to meet the needs of the children they serve. Also, all eight teachers reported that it was critically important for them to see their students succeed. The importance of their students' success was discussed 23 times in eight transcripts. Finally, four of the eight teachers in the research study came from similar backgrounds as the students they serve and they felt a need to give back to children in high poverty. Elaine explained, "...I feel obligated and I feel I owe it to these children [because I came from the same background]." Administrators, colleagues, family, pastors, and lifelong role

models were also listed as sources of strength by all eight teachers. All eight teachers reported they felt supported by their administration and colleagues. Supportive administration and a strong relationship to their grade level members or department were also discussed. Carol explained, “Well, I always talk about our principal. He’s just a leader.” Gloria relived the experience with coworkers, “My coworkers, I thoroughly enjoy them because they see the same things that [I] am going through with the [children] and they are very helpful....”

In conclusion, the researcher developed an understanding of several major relationship findings from the themes that emerged in lived experiences of the teachers. The major findings were the understanding of the relationship between the teachers and the students, the teachers and their colleagues and the teacher’s relationship to self. The researcher understood the relationship of the teacher to the student. A love for the students, the service to the students and meeting the needs of the students were evident factors in the established relationships from themes that emerged from the teacher to the students. Also, challenges with discipline and student relationships dissipated once teachers built relationships with students.

The relationship between the teachers and their colleagues or other adults was another major finding in the professional experiences of the teachers in this research study. These teachers depended upon other adults for support in their initial years at these schools. This support came from family member, church members and friends. However, in time relationships were built between these teachers and their colleagues and administration. These relationships involved communication and collaboration with the other adults in the building and a developed sense of belonging. Finally, a relationship (teacher to self) was identified in the professional experiences of these teachers. Half of these teachers came from similar backgrounds as the

students they taught. However, all of them had an intrinsic need to serve these children and an internal feeling of accomplishment and reward as they saw these students succeed.

The final finding that emerged from the professional experiences of these teachers was a sense of loyalty to the students. These teachers all felt a sense of loyalty to the students they served. In addition, they had a sense of self determination where they saw teaching the children as a challenge and were determined not to fail. These teachers were going to teach these children and help remove the obstacles so the students could be successful.

Table 10

*Professional Experiences: Themes to Major Findings*

Professional Experiences of Teachers In High Poverty Schools Themes to Major Relationship Findings								
Loyalty					Self Determination			
Relationship-Teacher to Student				Relationship-Teacher to Colleagues and Other Adults		Relationship-Teacher to Self		
Love for Children	Service to Children	Meet the Needs of Children	Discipline Challenges Decrease after Relationship is Established	Support was needed from Other Adults	Communication and Collaboration with Colleagues/Sense of Belonging	Need to Serve Students	Feeling of Success when Students Succeed	Teachers Came from Similar Backgrounds

**Teacher Challenges in High Poverty Schools**

**Research Question 2: What challenges do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?**

The investigator coded observations from field notes, state and district documents, and interviews with a superintendent, a principal, and eight teacher participants to understand challenges teachers face in high poverty schools. From the coding, six major themes emerged: working conditions; student discipline; negativity from colleagues; conflict with parents; lack of necessary resources; and isolation. The researcher organized the findings by theme and provided

narrative to illustrate the specific theme.

### **Working Conditions Create Challenges**

Challenging working conditions, including poor building conditions, a lack of resources, a curriculum that is constantly changing, and nonessential and intensive professional learning were emergent themes identified by the researcher from the coding of all eight teacher transcripts. Superintendent A explained the working conditions in the system, “The working conditions are challenging and diverse, and hard.”

A lack of resources was noted by four of the eight teachers and discussed seven times in eight transcripts. Carol explained, “Well whenever we don’t have what we need, I improvise, I mean it about getting the lesson across to those students. If I don’t have what I need, I’ll make it, I’ll make a way.” Helen continued to explain, “We don’t have any paper, ok, so I went up to the office and I saw a big stack of old calendars, well I used the back of those calendars.”

Superintendent A explained the impact from lack of resources, “Some teachers have left [the district] because of frustration with diminishing resources”.

The researcher also observed the challenging building conditions. The interview in school A took place in a gym several hundred feet from the main campus. The students had to walk to the facility for activities and the day of the interview it was raining. The seniors were having their pictures taken and participation had been down because they had to walk from the main building to the gym. The poor physical condition of school B was also observed and noted that the school was in need of repairs. The interview with Frances took place at a small table in the library. The library was very small in size and not very well lit. The tables were close to one another due to space limitations and it was difficult to conduct the interview due to interruptions



from people entering the small library. The researcher observed the limited space and poor physical condition of the school.

A changing curriculum was discussed by six of the eight teachers. These teachers felt that the curriculum or demands for lesson plans to be written a certain way created frustration and made the working conditions challenging. Helen discussed her frustration, "...They kept flipping [the curriculum]. They were so indecisive about the lesson plans." Frances concluded:

[It is] frustrating because [of] having to deal with the state and deal with the changes in curriculum and dealing with all these things that keep being thrown at us just because we are a needs improvement school and no one actually sticking with one program and letting it work without changing it.

Intensive professional learning was also discussed by seven of the eight teachers a total of six times in the eight transcripts and four of the eight teachers felt professional learning was overwhelming. The researcher clearly understood that professional learning for seven of these teachers was intensive and sometimes challenging. Dianne explained, "This year we've had a lot of professional learning to get caught up on standards based classrooms. It was very overwhelming we had so much to do."

### **Discipline Creates Challenges for Teachers**

The inappropriate behavior of students was the second major theme identified by the researcher. All of the eight teachers interviewed reported they had been in a situation where a student or group of students created a significant discipline challenge for them. Challenging student situations resulted in a significant degree of frustration felt by the teacher in every situation.

Aimee explained the challenge with students:

I see the children being more needy, emotionally. They are quick to anger so it's almost like you have to step gingerly around them and I think in five years here I've seen a difference in the type of student that comes in the door now. So for instance This year, I'm working with a group of challenging students both behaviorally and academically.

[My frustration level in this school comes from behavior] its behavior and lack of motivation on the student's part. It's almost like you can present a lesson 50 different ways and you still may not reach the child that you are trying to reach. When you sit up in your classroom and do not work at all, NONE...and the child [needs] something extra.

Barbara recalled the rude awakening she experienced:

My first year was a rude awakening. I had some very difficult students who got very physical with me. The students would curse you and get up in your face. That happened to me the first year with two students.

Dianne recollected an experience of shock:

My first year I had a girl and it was a sad story but she had been raped at a young age so she had a lot of emotional problems and so it came out in her behavior and she started wetting herself on purpose. So she had done that and gone to the bathroom and then I thought she was taking care of it, but then she came out with no pants on and was running around the room. That was my first year and I had no idea what to do.

Frances summarized her own challenging experience in a high poverty school:

[The] things that we as teachers or faculty members are exposed to. You know Fighting, constant fighting, disrespect from the students, the parents. You know, I've never been afraid, they don't scare me, but they do scare some people. I think I've only had two students who want to fight me.

The difficulty with student discipline also emerged from observations. As the researcher coded the field notes, school safety and discipline was an emergent theme in school A. There was a large full size metal detector that had to be walked through before entering the building. Also, a large public safety officer sat beside the metal detector and cleared people as they entered. It was evident to the researcher that discipline was a concern in the school. The researcher also noted in the field notes that a large fight had broken out in the hallway several minutes before the researcher conducted the interview.

### **Parents and Colleagues Create Isolation for Teachers**

Negative interactions with colleagues and parents were emergent themes that materialized from experiences of both the teachers and the principal. Seven of the eight teachers described challenges with other adults in the school. Teachers retold experiences when they felt alone when the other teachers in the building expressed negative attitudes about the school and the students. The negative attitudes of other teachers were discussed nine times in eight transcripts and the fact that teachers felt alone was elaborated on five times in two transcripts. Seven of the eight teachers recalled negative experiences with other teachers or administrators and discussed the lack of parental involvement in the school.

Barbara recalls in great detail her experience of loneliness from her colleagues:

Well, my first year here not too many people spoke to me. I think they were suspicious when I first got here. Not knowing who I was...I guess they were used to people spying on them and going back and telling the administration. So, they wouldn't speak to me my first year. A few people became my friends but overall they were kinda cold.

Dianne discussed experiences where she felt isolated, alone and unsuccessful:

Nothing was positive. Even my fellow teachers were telling me to look somewhere else and go to a school that is not this hard. Even race came into play, "you're white, you're white, you're a young girl that's too nice and you're not mean enough. You would do better somewhere else

Dianne continued:

People weren't really coming to see if I needed help, I had to go seek it out. So It is easy to feel alone and unsuccessful and you feel like your students aren't learning, you feel like you have behavior problems and everyone else has it together and their lines look good when they walk down the hallway...Support so, I felt like I didn't have the support or people coming alongside me to give me the tips and help me learn the tricks of teaching here.

Gloria stressed her frustration about parental involvement, "Their parents can't do anything with them. They come off and say they are going to take care of it and the same thing continues to go on." Principal A concluded:

Sometimes you are working so hard and it seems like the parents can just ruin a day when you know you are doing all you can for that child and then that can carry over a and then when you have some people who are not team players and you add those to the

equation, you know morale can be torn apart.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question 2: What challenges do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?**

Six major themes emerged as challenges that teachers encounter in high poverty schools. Working conditions, student discipline, negativity with colleagues, conflict with parents, lack of necessary resources and isolation were the six major themes that arose from the coding of the eight teachers' transcripts. A lack of resources was noted by four of the eight teachers and discussed seven times in the eight transcripts. Challenging situations with student discipline was relived a total of 19 times in the eight transcripts by all teachers. The negative attitudes of other teachers were discussed nine times in eight transcripts and the fact that teachers felt alone was elaborated on five times throughout two transcripts. Seven of the eight teachers recalled negative experiences with other teachers or administrators and discussed the lack of parental involvement in the school. Superintendent A summarized the challenges teachers face in high poverty schools, "I think the top three challenges teachers face in high poverty schools would be student discipline, leadership, and working conditions".

The themes in this study revealed three major relationship findings that were determined by the researcher in the challenges these teachers faced in high poverty schools. The relationship of the teacher to the student, the relationship of the teacher to their colleagues and their administration and finally the needs of the teachers in relationship to self was all established and themes developed that helped the researcher understand the challenges. First, challenging student discipline was described by all eight teachers. These discipline challenges negatively impacted the relationship of these teachers to the students they serve. Secondly, the relationship between



complete understanding of the love these teachers have for the teaching profession and the students in these schools. Aimee explained, “They’re children, they’re children, they’re not responsible for where they live or how they live, but you can help them to be more responsible.” Barbara continued, “First thing I love teaching, love it. I love teaching and I love the students that I have, “They are actually excited to learn. [I] try to serve them.

It was clear to the researcher that these teachers build relationships with the students and create a unique bond. Helen expressed the bond:

The kids, of course. The kids keep me walking in here, cause that’s my primary reason. It’s not the pay. The kids, their spirit, their resilience despite the things that go on and I’m a parent to all of them. [If I am not here, the students will say], “Where’s Helen, where’s Helen, oh no this is not gonna work, where’s Helen.”, “If Helen is not here, I’m not doing any work.” Dianne continued:

I do like, I do like the kids... You know this year for my birthday they were so excited and I just feel like they do love me and there is like that receptacle positive attitude and so they don’t show it all the time, but I [know] they do care.

The second source that emerged was selflessness on the part of the teacher. Selflessness, or the desire to serve these students and meet them where they were, was discussed a total of 18 times by all eight teachers in the eight transcripts. These teachers were committed to these schools and these students. They saw their teaching role as a servant role and a calling. Aimee explained:

I don’t really look at it as just teaching in a high poverty school. I just look at it as teaching. They’re my children; somebody’s got to teach them. Why not me?

why not...wouldn't you rather have a learning experience by someone who genuinely cares about you than someone who is just there to get a paycheck?

[I serve the students] whether it means staying up until one or two in the morning doesn't really matter. If I gotta get it done, then I gotta get it done.

The third major source that emerged from the coding was the commitment these teachers felt to the job and to the students. Commitment to the job was discussed 16 times in eight transcripts and commitment to the students was discussed 12 times in eight transcripts. The researcher clearly found all of these teachers took commitment seriously and when they made a commitment they finished the task. Barbara described her commitment to one student:

...I didn't give up on her. It was very difficult. She made it difficult but I didn't give up.

I sat with her, I worked with her, I kept her back when she had to be kept back from something and worked with her on what she needed help with. I think letting her know that I cared about her in some way she started to realize that everybody didn't hate her.

I think me not giving up on her. She didn't give up on herself.

Frances concluded:

I have a contract so my word means more than anything else and then having lived in similar situations as these kids you can't just come in and out there is a trust issue there which would could negatively affect them. So, it more of looking beyond myself to see who am I influencing and how much do I want to impact their lives...

High expectations and a high belief in the abilities of their students was the fourth and final source of satisfaction that emerged from the coding all eight transcripts. It was discussed a



total of 26 times in eight transcripts and the belief in their students were discussed eight times in the eight transcripts. Carol explained:

I feel like the students, they want, they want to learn. Even though they come to us with deficits if we stay firm as teachers and we believe in them and if we challenge them, they are up for the challenge.

### **Reasons Teachers Stay in High Poverty Schools**

The experiences of all eight teachers revealed a major relationship theme (relationship to the students and relationship with colleagues and administration) as the reasons the eight teachers' sustained employment in high poverty schools. All eight teachers discussed the love for their children, the self identification when these students succeed or make accomplishments and the support from their colleagues and administrators as reasons they remained. The love for the children these teachers served was a theme the researcher identified almost immediately in the coding of the transcripts of all eight teachers. This theme emerged as it was coded a total of 28 times in eight transcripts. The teachers also discussed 31 times how they felt successful with the accomplishments of their students. Elaine explained, "Seeing my children's eyes light up when they understand something and seeing when they are successful and not just making 100, but if they're successful in passing with a 75 or 80 for the first time."

These teachers all felt a sense of loyalty to the students they served. In addition, they had a sense of self determination where they saw teaching the children as a challenge and were determined not to fail. These teachers were going to teach these children and help remove the obstacles so the students could be successful.

Strong support from grade level coworkers and the administration were emergent themes from the coding throughout the eight interviews. A strong department was discussed 12 times in eight transcripts, a strong relationship to colleagues was discussed seven times in eight transcripts, helping one another through collaboration and communication was discussed 16 times in eight transcripts and all eight teachers stated that failure was not an option personally and for the students they serve.

Carol explained:

The ELA department is the type of department where we absolutely refuse to see anyone fail. Whenever one needs help, they are there, it's like failing is not an option so that helps me become better. We challenge each other and that only makes us stronger because we want to see everybody succeed. These are the best people, they are great and you know even though our principal is hard, he makes you...I can always work for him because he understands, I think he understands [and supports us].

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question 3: What satisfaction do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?**

The research study revealed four themes that emerged from the teachers in this study as they discussed sources that created satisfaction for them in these high poverty schools. The love for teaching, a need to serve these students, a positive relationship with colleagues and commitment echoed time and time again as the teachers recalled their experiences. The love for teaching was discussed 10 times in eight transcripts and the love for children was discussed in detail a total of 25 times. The need for these teachers to be servant teachers or a selfness on the part of these teachers to serve was discussed a total of 18 times by all eight teachers.

Commitment to both the job and the students was the final source and it was discussed 16 times in eight transcripts. Commitment to the students was discussed 12 times in eight transcripts. All eight teachers recalled a strong commitment to the students and their job as a teacher. A strong relationship to colleagues was also discussed seven times in eight transcripts, helping one another through collaboration and communication was discussed 16 times in eight transcripts and seven of the eight teachers expressed commitment to their coworkers. The love these teachers have for the students in these schools, a constant need to serve and commitment to the students, coworkers and their job gave the researcher a complete understanding that the relationships with students, colleagues and administration was the reasons teachers remained in these schools.

The four themes that emerged from the teachers in this study as they discussed sources that created satisfaction for them in these high poverty schools helped the researcher understand that relationships created satisfaction for these teachers. The love for teaching and the students was major themes that emerged that helped the researcher understand the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the students. Positive interactions, communication and collaboration directly confirmed the power of the relationships between the teachers and their colleagues and administration. These interactions and opportunities created satisfaction for the teachers in these schools. The themes of commitment to the students and a need to serve the students helped the researcher understand the relationship these teachers had to themselves. Teachers in this study experienced satisfaction in these schools. The themes clearly defined the three powerful relationships that created satisfaction for these teachers. The relationship between the teacher and the student, the relationship between the teacher and their colleagues and

administration and the relationship of the teacher to herself created a satisfaction situation and these teachers remained.

A final source of satisfaction for these teachers was a sense of loyalty to the students. These teachers all felt a sense of loyalty to the students they served. In addition, they had a sense of self determination where they saw teaching the children as a challenge and were determined not to fail. These teachers were going to teach these children and help remove the obstacles so the students could be successful.

Table 12

*Teacher Satisfaction: Themes to Major Findings*

Loyalty				Self Determination	
Relationship-Teacher to Student	Relationship-Teacher to Colleagues and Administration			Relationship-Teacher to Self-The Needs of Teachers	
Love shown to children- positive relationship	Positive Interactions with Colleagues	Collaboration and Communication	Positive Relationship to Administration	Commitment	Need to Serve Students

**Opportunities that Alleviate Challenges in High Poverty Schools**

**Research Question 4: What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?**

Working conditions, student discipline, negativity with colleagues and isolation were major themes that were identified by the researcher as challenges that teachers experienced in high poverty schools. The researcher understood from the superintendent and the principal that good working conditions and recognition for teachers was important. Superintendent A explained:

Trying to get principals and leaders in schools to create a culture of celebrating success, meaning recognition opportunities and just a different approach to why you're in it meaning that you're in it for the outcome...

Principal A explained the how she created supportive working conditions in her school:

I think the working conditions here are pretty good. I think that we try to show appreciation, you know, put a little something in their box here and there, we do things for the teachers, PTA does stuff for the teachers and I think we have a pretty good working relationship and a good working environment. We want teachers to feel appreciated and know that they belong.

### **Time Allows Teachers to Build Relationships with Colleagues**

Time and support in the school was noted in several of the transcripts as an opportunity that alleviated challenges. Teachers' experiences in high poverty schools improved with time and support from their colleagues and administration. This research study found that seven of the eight teachers relived experiences in these schools that began as challenging and ended in success with time and support. Carol explained:

My first year here, it wasn't necessarily my best year with discipline because I saw some things and where parent [involvement] was out of the window. But now it's like night and day. I set the expectations for them from day one. I don't have any problems with any of the children.

Dianne concluded:

It's a blessing that I was with this team [of colleagues] and now me and another teacher that started out new together are more of the leaders this year helping other teachers so

I'm glad to take over that role. I feel like, like I said, the environment has changed this year... it's still the same people but everyone is a whole lot nicer and pleasant and so it's really nice.

### **Relationships with Students Positively Impact Student Discipline**

Superintendent A explained the challenge of student discipline, "The number one indicator of if teachers remain is classroom management and discipline issues with children." The challenges with student discipline were experienced by seven of the eight teachers. However, a positive relationship between the teachers and the students built on understanding and communication was a theme that emerged that would alleviate discipline problems for teachers. Helen explained:

I don't have discipline problems in my class. Communication [with the kids is the answer] and I try not to push religion onto our kids. One young lady, a month ago started off on me and I let her have her time. Well let me tell, you know, where I'm coming from so I know where you're coming from. You have to get an understanding because what's disrespectful to me, she might not think is disrespectful. Once you get a level of understanding then she realized maybe [Helen] is right and I can conform because she cares.

Carol affirmed:

I just try to be myself with the students, being no tolerance [with discipline] almost. I mean I just, I just want them to succeed and they have to understand they cannot succeed skipping, they cannot succeed by not listening, so when I established that relationship I don't have discipline problems with any of the children, they

respect me.

Principal A concluded:

Once the kids know that they are loved they'll work for you even if they don't feel like working for themselves, but they've got to feel the love and that's just the bottom line. You've got to love those students, they've got to know you love them, they've got to understand that you expect the most of them. That you will not accept anything less than what they are capable of and they will behave and excel. In addition, the teachers developed a sense of loyalty to the students. These teachers all felt a sense of loyalty to the students they served. Finally, they had a sense of self determination where they saw teaching the children as a challenge and were determined not to fail. These teachers were going to teach these children and help remove the obstacles so the students could be successful.

### **Administrative Support Combats Teacher Challenges**

Administrative support was another theme that emerged from the teachers' experiences as conditions that would alleviate challenges and improve teacher retention. The need for positive administrative support was discussed by all eight teachers 56 times. Due to better administrative support this year had been much better for Dianne because the school had been assigned a new administrator. Dianne testified:

So this year has been totally different. It's a lot more fair. I'm going to do my job the best I can and I feel like the administration will support me if I'm doing my job and that makes sense. So, I feel like it's a lot more fair and you know what the expectations are before it was just very unclear and that's what gave me the fear.

Openness and a willingness on the part of principal A to her empower her staff was important. Principal A elaborated, “I would say that I’m the type of leader who does not mind listening to others and taking other ideas. I’ll say let’s come together as a group and if the idea is good we go for it.” The field notes confirmed principal A’s leadership style. The researcher entered the building to complete the interview and the principal had several teachers in a small group discussing a situation. One teacher gave an idea and the principal gave permission to move forward with the idea.

### **Strong Pre Service Opportunities and Recruiting Efforts Battle Teacher Attrition**

The experiences of the participants revealed the themes of better pre service opportunities and recruiting efforts as conditions that could possibly battle teacher attrition in high poverty schools. Dianne explained, “To be completely honest, my first two years were very very tough. It’s very challenging learning how to discipline them. I didn’t have much experience in that so I struggled. I didn’t understand their environment.” Superintendent A believes higher education facilities should specialize more in the training of urban education for students who will be teaching in high poverty schools. Superintendent A explained, “For teacher preparation program that are actually not up to date in preparing teachers to deal with urban education.”

Another opportunity that could alleviate challenges in high poverty schools was the fact that administrators should recruit teachers who believe in the children they serve. A strong belief system in the students and a relationship with these students have alleviated challenges and allowed these teachers to sustain employment.



Superintendent A explained:

...Find people who have a belief system that poverty is only a bump in the road or a hurdle to overcome but it's not an end result or a total blocking because it isn't. Those who have a belief system of high expectations for all children are what we look for.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question 4: What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?**

Working conditions, student discipline, relationships with students and colleagues were major themes that were identified by the researcher as challenges that teachers experienced in high poverty schools. However, good working conditions for teachers and time for teachers to build relationships with coworkers and administrators and develop a sense of belonging seemed to alleviate the challenges of teaching in high poverty schools. All of the eight teachers in this research study revealed that they felt a sense of belonging in their schools and had a strong support system. A positive relationship with colleagues that collaborate and communicate as they help one another succeed was discussed 35 times in the eight transcripts. Aimee concluded, "Our administrators and my colleagues are very supportive."

Two other opportunities existed that alleviated challenges and created satisfaction for the eight teachers who participated in this research study. The love for children and a relationship with students were critical to the success of teachers who remain in high poverty schools. The principal explained, "...Have a rapport with students and that's the biggest...all teachers who have rapport with students see higher quality work from students, you see happier teachers and happier students." A positive relationship between the teachers and the students built on

understanding and communication was a theme that emerged that would eliminate discipline problems for teachers and make students and teachers happier. Positive relationships with students were discussed by all eight teachers 27 times in the eight transcripts.

A more proactive recruiting system where administrators hire teachers with a strong belief system and a love for children created opportunities to alleviate challenges in high poverty schools. However, strong relationships with students, administrators and coworkers were the major findings that emerged from common themes as these teachers relived their experiences. Coworkers who helped teachers were discussed by all eight teachers in this research study. The teachers continued to voice the opportunities that alleviated challenges for them in these schools was the continued relationship with their students and the support of their colleagues and administrators. All of the eight teachers in this research study revealed that they felt a sense of belonging in their schools and had a strong support system in their relationship to colleagues and administration. Finally, teachers in this study revealed a need for better pre service opportunities to understand the environment that exists in high poverty schools as an opportunity to improve teacher retention.

Table 13

*Opportunities for Success: Themes to Major Findings*

Relationship-Teacher to Student ↓	Relationship-Teacher to Colleagues and Administration ↓ ↓			Relationship-Teacher to Self-The Needs of Teachers ↓ ↓	
Love Shown to Children- Positive Relationship Built with Time	Time to Have Positive Interactions with Colleagues	Recruiting where Administrators Select Teachers to Match School	Positive Relationship to Administration	Improved Pre Service Opportunities	Sense of Belonging

## **Sustained Employment in High Poverty Schools: Over Arching Question**

### **Why do teachers remain in high poverty schools?**

The experiences of all eight teachers revealed major relationship finding (relationship to the students, relationship with colleagues and administration and relationship to self) as the reasons the eight teachers' sustained employment in high poverty schools. The relationship these teachers built with their students was founded on the love for children and an altruistic attitude in each of these teachers. The relationship between the teachers, their colleagues and administration were also a significant finding in relationship to why these teachers remained. The self reward when these students would succeed or make accomplishments and the desire to help these students and save them one child at a time was the third major finding that appeared in within these teachers as a relationship to self and ultimately the reason these teachers remained.

### **Summary**

Relationships, loyalty and self determination were the key findings that emerged from the lived experiences of the eight teachers in this study. The researcher understood that the relationships between the teacher and the student, the teacher and their colleagues, and the teacher and their administration were critically important in their experiences and ultimately in their decision to stay. The four teachers in this study that came from similar backgrounds as the students they served seemed to have a very deep understanding of their students and the challenges they faced. However, all of the teachers meet the needs of the children they served and student discipline improved over time. All eight teachers reported that it was critically important for them to see their students succeed. The teachers in this study felt rewarded and gained a sense of accomplishment as they saw their students succeed. They also stressed the

importance the relationships with their colleagues and administration in terms of support and commitment.

The research study revealed the teachers in this study faced challenges and difficult working conditions especially in their first year of teaching. Novice teachers in high poverty schools often faced discipline problems, isolation, and a lack of support. However, there were sources of satisfaction and opportunities that alleviated these challenges. The research study revealed several sources that created satisfaction for teachers in these high poverty schools. The love for teaching, the need to have a relationship with students, a positive relationship with colleagues and administration, time, better pre service experiences, effective induction programs and more effective recruiting were all findings from the research study that could provide opportunities and improve teacher retention in high poverty schools. However, the major findings in this research study were the importance of relationships (teacher to student, teacher to colleagues and administration, and teacher to self), the loyalty the teachers felt for the students and a sense of self determination. These teachers all felt a sense of loyalty to the students they served. In addition, they had a sense of self determination where they saw teaching the children as a challenge and were determined not to fail. These teachers were going to teach these children and help remove the obstacles so the students could be successful and children would be educated.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, OVERVIEW OF STUDY, FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The teacher is the most critical factor in student achievement (Rice, 2003; Ingersoll, 2004; Owings et al., 2006), and according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003); teacher retention is the answer to ensure America's classrooms are filled with highly qualified teachers. In fact, Fowler (2003) stated, "Improving teacher supply and quality is among the most important educational issues the United States faces today as policy makers seek to hire, over the next ten years, both more and better teachers than ever before."

However, the education profession is losing teachers in alarming numbers and the cost associated with these departures is staggering for states (Fowler, 2003 & Rothschild, 2006). The cost of teacher attrition or teachers who leave prematurely is sometimes irreversible for students (Snow, Burns & Giffin, 1998) and very expensive for school organizations (Arnold-Massey (2006). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) found that the estimate for urban school districts associated with teacher transfers is \$70,000 per year.

Lack of administrative support, student discipline, difficulty with poor working conditions and lack of effective experiences in teacher preparation both before and after graduation are the four key factors that continually emerged from the literature as major factors teachers gave for leaving classrooms (Ingersoll, 2001; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Nelson, 2004; Buckley et al., 2005; Greiner & Smith, 2006 & Kipkowski, 2008). These four factors were compounded in high poverty schools and these schools continued to have a harder time retaining

teachers than schools with higher socio economic populations (Park, 2003). However, as teachers maintain employment in high poverty schools despite the odds, the literature was less clear as to why they remain. There were very few studies that examined reasons teachers remained in high poverty school. In one study, Hammerness (2006) found that these teachers remained because they felt like they were making a difference with students and saving one student at a time. The researcher in this study was an administrator in a Georgia school district and had previously witnessed classrooms in high poverty schools with a high rate of teacher turnover in one year. The researcher also witnessed teachers in these high poverty schools who were committed to the students and maintained employment in these schools. As a result, the researcher in this study investigated the lived experiences through qualitative approach to understand why teachers remain in high poverty schools.

### **Overview of Study**

In order to explore the experiences of teachers who remain in high poverty schools, the researcher used semi structured interviews, field notes and district and state documents as sources of data in this study. The researcher used semi structured interviews as the main source of data for the study and employed an instrument consisting of an interview protocol with open-ended, in-depth interview questions that were used to guide the inquiry. The qualitative research study with the use of thematic analysis allowed the researcher to understand the lived experiences of the eight teachers who have taught more than two consecutive years in four high poverty schools, the challenges these teacher faced and the opportunities that allowed teachers to remain. Also, one principal and one superintendent provided insight into teacher retention. Of the eight participants, all eight teachers were female. One was Caucasian and seven were African-

American. The principal was an African American female and the superintendent was an African American male. The eight teacher participants represented a teaching range from kindergarten through grade twelve. The researcher collected data through scheduled, in-depth interviews with the eight teachers (4 elementary, 2 middle and 2 high) from four high poverty schools, one principal from one of the four high poverty schools and the superintendent of Selected School District. The researcher identified common themes, commonalities, and patterns to respond to the questions of the study (see Appendix E). Field notes from the observations, The Report Card from the Georgia Department of Education, School Max and IFAS the district's student and employee information systems were also used as additional data in the study.

In Chapter Five, the discussion was framed by research questions of the study, including the overarching question: Why do teachers remain in high poverty schools? The following four research questions guided the inquiry.

1. What experiences do teachers describe as a professional in high poverty school?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?
3. What satisfaction do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?
4. What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?

### **Major Findings**

The researcher in this study found the following from the lived experiences of teachers in high poverty schools:

- The teachers loved these children, strived to meet the needs of these children, and felt a sense of satisfaction, excitement, and accomplishment when their students would succeed.
- The teachers developed a sense of loyalty to the students they served.
- The teachers were self determined and saw teaching as a challenge where failure was not an option.
- The teachers were committed to the job and the children.
- Teachers did face difficult and challenging working conditions such as lack of supplies and poor building conditions.
- Teachers also faced challenging working conditions in regards to student discipline, not being accepted by coworkers resulting in isolation especially in their first year of teaching in high poverty schools.
- Although teachers in high poverty schools faced many challenges such as poor working conditions, poor student discipline and lack of support from colleagues, they persevered because of a strong sense of purpose and support from family and other adults.
- The relationships between the teacher and the student and the teacher and their colleagues and administration and the teacher to herself were critically important to retaining teachers in high poverty schools.



- Teachers who remained in high poverty schools built relationships with the students they served by having and communicating high expectations and love.
- The relationship with students, colleagues and administration was not always prevalent at first but over time the relationships developed and teachers felt a sense of belonging to their schools and did not want to leave.
- Induction programs to build supportive discipline strategies and relationships with colleagues are needed for novice teachers in high poverty schools.
- These teachers valued communication and collaboration with their colleagues and administration.
- Teachers stressed the importance of supportive and fair administrators.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **Love, Satisfaction, and Commitment**

The researcher in this study found in the teachers' experiences, the love for children, the desire to meet the needs of these students, the importance of success for these students and the need to serve these students. It was also clear from the experiences of all eight teachers that they felt a sense of excitement and accomplishment when their students were successful. The researcher also found the teachers who served these children were committed to the students and the profession. They were a servant to the students first, and then a teacher and they remained because of relationships they built with the students. These teachers put others before themselves, were caring, compassionate and empowering. The eight teachers' reasons for remaining in high poverty schools were teaching was a calling in their lives, they loved children and teaching. These were the same reasons teachers gave for entering the field of education

according to Gordon (1993). Teachers enter the field of education because they want to make a difference in other people's lives and they love teaching and children (Gordon, 1993).

Commitment to both the job and the students as well as a strong relationship to colleagues created satisfying experiences for all of the teachers in this research study.

The researcher came away with the complete understanding the three types of relationships that these teachers developed within these schools. The relationship the teachers built with their students was a common thread and the most powerful reason these teachers remained. However, a second important relationship was evident in this study. The relationship between the teacher and colleagues as well as administration was also an important incentive that caused these teachers to remain. Finally, the third type of relationship the researcher understood was the relationship of the teachers to herself. These teachers were intrinsically motivated by the success of their students. They felt a sense of accomplishment when their students succeeded and a sense of belonging when the relationships with students and other adults were positive.

### **Working Conditions Create Challenges**

The challenges that teachers face in high poverty schools were relived in the interviews of all eight teachers, the principal and the superintendent. The researcher found that working conditions were a significant challenge. Lack of supplies and poor physical building conditions were of concern to these teachers and these finding mirrored the findings of Buckley et al. (2005). According to Buckley et al. (2005), teachers are also frustrated because they do not have the basic supplies and essential materials to teach the students in their classrooms. Teachers who did not have adequate supplies in their classrooms tend to leave because they became dissatisfied with these challenging circumstances (Buckley et al.).

Working conditions in relationship to poor student discipline and conflict with colleagues also emerged as key challenges for these teachers. All of these teachers had challenges with student discipline and some had conflicts with colleagues especially in their first year at these high poverty schools. Working conditions, student discipline, conflict with colleagues were relived time and time again as the teachers recalled the challenges they faced. The challenges the teachers in this study faced were the same as the challenges other teachers have faced and ultimately lead to their departure from the classrooms. Poor student discipline, poor working conditions, a lack of colleague and administrative support were reasons teachers continued to give as they left schools (Reynolds, Ross, & Rakow, 2002; Inman & Marlow (2004); Goode, Quartz, Barraza-Lyons and Thomas, 2004; Buckley, et al. (2005). Finally, the researcher in this study corroborated the finding of Park (2003); Inman & Marlow (2004) & Buckley et al. (2005) when they found that these factors were compounded in high poverty schools.

### **Relationships Key to Teacher Retention**

The researcher clearly understood the most influential factor to positively impact teacher retention in high poverty schools was the relationships with students. Teachers who remained in high poverty schools built relationships with the students they served by having and communicating high expectations. The relationship these teachers built with students was the most compelling of the research findings. The researcher's finding supported Hammerness (2006) who found that these teachers remain because they feel like they are making a difference with students and saving one student at a time. However, the researcher in this study found that the relationships the teachers built with the students were a more critical factor in why these teachers remained.

Teachers remained in this study because of the positive relationships with colleagues. The teachers in this study needed to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance from their colleagues. Johnson & Birkleland (2003) had a similar finding when he found that a sense of belonging with colleagues was an incentive to keep teachers in the classrooms. These relationships did not always develop immediately. In fact, it took time for some of these teachers to develop relationships with their colleagues. However, they valued the opportunities to communicate and collaborate with their coworkers. These findings supported Hammerness (2006) when he found, “Teachers sought colleagues who would share advice and feedback...” (p. 4). Finally, these teachers also discussed how family and other important people provided support when they needed encouragement and wanted to leave.

Positive relationships with administrators were another major finding in this research study. Teachers in this study valued fair and supportive administration. All eight teachers felt that their administration was an important part of the reason they remained. These finding echoed the findings of Singh & Billingsley (1998). Principal support appears to be the most important component to teachers’ well-being and a critical factor in retaining teachers (Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Rothschild (2006) confirmed this finding in a survey of 21,000 Kansas teachers and stated, “The quality of school leaders is the top reason teachers stay in the profession [and] the leadership factor appears to be the most significant factor in teacher retention” (p. 1).

### **Opportunities Create Success**

A more proactive recruiting system where administrators hire teachers with a strong belief system, a love for children, and a servant nature could create opportunities to alleviate

challenges in high poverty schools. The teachers in this study were a servant to the children; they showed love and compassion and built relationships. The teacher characteristics in this study related closely to the characteristics found by Crippin (2005) when he discussed the servant leadership found in some administrators. Crippin (2005) stated, “A servant-leader is a true humanitarian, puts others before self, caring and compassionate, balanced and one who empowers others and a servant first and then a leader.

The researcher in this study found major characteristics in these teachers as it related to altruism. Altruism is a concept used for identifying individuals who are self-sacrificing and direct their concern toward others. Altruism had been identified as a factor in teachers’ motivation for remaining in difficult schools. According to some theoreticians, altruism is helping others without an external award (Macaulay & Berkowitz, 1970). The teachers wanted to help these children and this aligned with the concept of altruism. They also did not receive an external award. However, they did receive an internal reward when their children would succeed and they did not see the work they did as self-sacrificing. These teachers also developed a sense loyalty to these students. These teachers all felt a sense of loyalty to the students they served. In addition, they had a sense of self determination where they saw teaching the children as a challenge and were determined not to fail. These teachers were going to teach these children and help remove the obstacles so the students could be successful.

Other opportunities that could provide longevity in schools were induction programs to build supportive discipline strategies and relationships with colleagues. Induction programs for teachers in their first year of teaching would allow opportunities for these teachers to build relationships with colleagues and create a sense of belonging. Comprehensive teacher induction

programs have continued to top the list as a possible solution for teacher retention (Goode et al., 2004; Hope, 1999 & McCabe, 2008).

### **Conclusions**

The researcher in this study drew the following conclusions from the findings in this study:

1. The love for children and an altruistic attitude to serve children are major factors that influence teachers to maintain employment in high poverty schools.
2. Positive relationships with students, colleagues, family, other support people, and administration contribute to teachers' desire to serve in high poverty schools.
3. Teachers were loyal to their students and were determined to educate these students and not fail.
4. Teachers in high poverty schools face challenges especially in their first year but perseverance, commitment, and selflessness help novice teachers overcome the obstacles.

### **Implications**

The researcher considered that this research study would add to the body of literature concerning teacher retention and the reasons teachers maintained employment in high poverty schools. More specifically, the researcher contributed through the lived experiences of these teachers an understanding of the challenges teachers faced and the opportunities that allowed for longevity in high poverty schools. Based upon the findings of the study, the following should be considered:

1. Understanding the issue of teacher retention in high poverty schools and the reasons these teachers maintain employment in these schools may reduce teacher attrition rates.

2. Administrators should provide opportunities to provide teachers, especially new teachers with support of their ideas and hold meaningful conversations as they create a climate that ensures success.
3. Induction programs for novice teachers in high poverty schools are essential in helping teachers overcome challenges in early years in the profession.
4. Grade levels and or departments should have collaborative time to communicate and support one another.
5. School policies and procedures should emphasize a structure that provides time for collaboration.
6. More training in student discipline and intensive field experiences in urban school settings is needed in pre service programs to prepare teachers.
7. Districts should provide more training in urban culture, high poverty schools and student discipline for educators of high poverty schools on building positive relationships with students and colleagues and a common sense of purpose.
8. The researcher of this study was affected greatly by this study and will continue to find ways to combat teacher attrition in high poverty schools.
9. Educators have a responsibility to reduce teacher attrition and the results of this study provided policy makers with information to reduce teacher attrition.

### **Recommendations**

After a thorough examination of the data yielded from this study, the researcher recommended that the following studies were worth consideration:

1. Replicate the qualitative study with eight teachers in high poverty schools, one principal and one superintendent outside the CSRA to determine the reasons teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools.
2. Employ a combined quantitative and qualitative study to gain a more detailed understanding of the teachers and their demographics who sustain employment in high poverty schools.
3. Employ a combined quantitative and qualitative study to gain details into the similarities and differences between the servant teacher and the servant leader.
4. Employ a qualitative study to gain more detail into the reasons teachers and student build relationships and why other teachers and students fail to build these relationships.
5. Employ a qualitative study to gain more detail into the urban school culture and coworker relationships.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The researcher, an administrator in Georgia, was greatly impacted by the findings of this study. Throughout the various interviews, the researcher became increasingly aware of the importance of the relationships between these teachers and their students, colleagues and administrators. Also, these teachers constantly recalled in experience after experience their need to love and serve the children in the schools. All of these teachers discussed the challenges that were present in these high poverty schools with working conditions, student discipline and lack of necessary materials. However, their personal stories led the researcher to more fully understand the strong bond that developed between these teachers and their students, colleagues



and administrators. Although the participants often felt frustrated and alone; they were determined and seemed to regain purpose as they recalled their loyalty, love and commitment to the students they taught.

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APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT FOR SCHOOLS



## APPENDIX A



**College of Graduate Studies**  
**Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Resources**

\_\_\_\_\_ School

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Augusta, GA 30904

July 16, 2009

Principal,

My name is Karen Davis and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I will be completing data collection for my dissertation in the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2010. I am requesting that your school participate in my study of Why Teachers Sustain Employment in High Poverty Schools.

If you should agree to participate in this study, you will be contacted in the latter part of 2009 and asked to provide the names of all of your teachers who have worked for two or more consecutive years at \_\_\_\_\_ School. The teachers will then be selectively sampled and two of these teachers will be contacted for individual interviews. The interviews will take place at \_\_\_\_\_ School either before or after school hours and will in no way impact the instructional day. Also, if you agree to participate in this study you may be asked to participate in a focus group with other principals to discuss the challenges these teachers face and the opportunities that allow for longevity in your school. The school and all participants' names will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to report all findings in this study

It is the researcher's epistemological belief that this study will provide a more detailed analysis of why teachers remain in high poverty schools and for your participation in the study you will be provided an electronic copy of the research study for your school.

I would like to thank you for your consideration in this matter and if you are willing to participate in this study. Please sign the informed consent section below and contact me at 706-833-7072. I will then come to your school and pick the letter up.

\_\_\_\_\_ My school and I are willing to participate in this study with Karen Davis

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Principal of School

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, INFORMED CONSENT AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR  
TEACHERS

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol for Teachers

#### Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study under the director of Dr. Barbara Mallory, of the Department of Educational Leadership, Georgia Southern University. Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary.

#### 1. Why is this study being done?

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are currently a teacher in a high poverty school in a desired Georgia school district. The research will be done at your place of employment.

The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools.

A total of 10 participants will be asked to take part in this study. Two teachers with two or more consecutive years of teaching from four high poverty schools (2 elementary, 1 middle and 1 high) will be asked to participate. You and another colleague from your school will be asked to participate.

#### 2. What is involved in this study?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will participate in one interview. The following activities are specifically research related: signing the consent form and participating in the interview.

The amount of time you will spend in connection with this study is one hour.

The interview will be audio recorded.

#### 3. What are the risks of participating in this study?

There are no physical risks associated with this study. However, some of the questions that will be asked may be uncomfortable for you to answer. You may refuse to answer any of the questions at any time during this study. You also may stop participation in this study at anytime with penalty.

## APPENDIX B (continued)

## Interview Protocol for Teachers

Every effort will be taken to ensure confidentiality in this study. All results or data from this study will be presented with fake names and pseudonyms. Your identity will be kept confidential unless required by law.

4. What are the benefits of taking part in this study?

You will not benefit directly from this study. However, the benefit could be to one specific Georgia school system as well as the educational community in general in a more detailed understanding of why teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools.

5. Problems or questions

The Educational Leadership Department of Georgia Southern University, at telephone number, 912-478-2647, can provide additional information about your rights as a participant in this research project. Further information regarding this study can be obtained by contacting Karen Davis at telephone 706-833-7072.

6. Documentation of informed consent

The information and the details of this study have been explained and my questions up until this point have been answered by Karen Davis. I will take a few minutes and read the consent form provided to me by Karen Davis. My signature on the consent form gives my permission to continue this interview and have it audio taped. I fully understand that I am giving my consent to participate in this study and I may withdraw from this study without penalty at anytime.

## APPENDIX B (continued)

## Informed Consent Letter for Teachers



**College of Graduate Studies**  
**Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Resources**

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

October 13, 2009

Dear Participant,

My name is Karen Davis and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I will be completing data collection for my dissertation in the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2010. I am conducting a study on why teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools in order to learn more about teacher retention. It is the researcher's epistemological belief that this study will provide a more detailed analysis of teacher retention in high poverty schools.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are currently a superintendent, principal or teacher in a high poverty school district in Georgia. You may contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at Georgia Southern University at 1-912-478-0843 about your rights as a research participant or if you have any concerns or questions regarding this study.

There are no physical risks associated with this study and taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any of the questions at anytime during this study and may stop participation in this study at anytime without penalty. Every effort will be taken to ensure confidentiality and all results or data from this study will be presented with fake names and pseudonyms. Your identity will be kept confidential unless required by law.

The information on this form has been discussed by the researcher and I understand the details of this study so far. My questions up until this point have been answered by Karen Davis. My signature below gives my permission to participate in this study and continue this interview. I fully understand that I may withdraw from this study without penalty at anytime.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Name (printed) and signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

## APPENDIX B (continued)

## Interview Questions for Teachers

## Research Question 1

How do teachers describe their experiences as a professional in high poverty schools?

1. Can you tell me about a teaching experience in this school?
2. Discuss your vision of education and how it relates to you as the practitioner.

## Research Question 2

What challenges do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?

1. Tell about your experiences with the working conditions in this school.

## Research Question 3

What satisfaction do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?

1. What satisfies you most about teaching in a high poverty school?
2. Explain an experience where you felt very satisfied teaching in this school.
3. Why do you choose to teach in a high poverty school?

## Research Question 4

What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?

1. Describe the administrators in this school.
2. Can you tell me about a time when you considered leaving your school to teach somewhere else?
3. Why did you want to stay?
4. Tell you tell me about the discipline in this school
5. Explain your professional learning as an educator since you have been employed at this school.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, INFORMED CONSENT AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR  
TEACHERS

## APPENDIX C

## Interview Protocol for Principal

## 1. Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study under the director of Dr. Barbara Mallory, of the Department of Educational Leadership, Georgia Southern University. Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary.

## 2. Why is this study being done?

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are currently a principal in a high poverty school in a desired Georgia School District. The research will be done at the board of education office.

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges teachers face in high poverty schools and the opportunities that allow for longevity in these schools.

A total of 10 participants will be asked to take part in this study. Two teachers with two or more consecutive years of teaching from four high poverty schools (2 elementary, 1 middle and 1 high) will be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews. You are the principal with the lowest teacher retention rate out of the four high poverty schools. You are being asked to provide a more detailed understanding of the challenges these teachers face and the opportunities that allow for longevity in your school.

## 3. What is involved in this study?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will participate in one semi-structured interview. The following activities are specifically research related: signing the consent form and participating in the focus group.

The amount of time you will spend in connection with this study is 30 minutes to one hour.

The interview will be audio recorded.

## 4. What are the risks of participating in this study?

There are no physical risks associated with this study. However, some of the questions that will be asked may be uncomfortable for you to answer. You may refuse to answer any of the questions at any time during this study. You also may stop participation in this study at anytime with penalty.



## APPENDIX C (continued)

## Interview Protocol for Principal

Every effort will be taken to ensure confidentiality in this study. All results or data from this study will be presented with fake names and pseudonyms. Your identity will be kept confidential unless required by law.

## 5. What are the benefits of taking part in this study?

You will not benefit directly from this study. However, the benefit could be to your school by analyzing the data in this study and understanding in more detail how your teachers see the challenges they face and why they sustain employment in your school. A larger benefit may be to the educational community in general in a more detailed understanding of why teacher sustain employment in high poverty schools.

## 6. Problems or questions

The Educational Leadership Department of Georgia Southern University, at telephone number, 912-478-2647, can provide additional information about your rights as a participant in this research project. Further information regarding this study can be obtained by contacting Karen Davis at telephone 706-833-7072.

## 7. Documentation of informed consent

The information and the details of this study have been explained and my questions up until this point have been answered by Karen Davis. I will take a few minutes and read the consent form provided to me by Karen Davis. My signature on the consent form gives my permission to continue this interview and have it audio taped. I fully understand that I am giving my consent to participate in this study and I may withdraw from this study without penalty at anytime.

## APPENDIX C (continued)

## Informed Consent Letter for Principal



**College of Graduate Studies**

**Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Resources**

Principal's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

October 13, 2009

Dear Principal,

My name is Karen Davis and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I will be completing data collection for my dissertation in the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2010. I am conducting a study on why teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools in order to learn more about teacher retention. It is the researcher's epistemological belief that this study will provide a more detailed analysis of teacher retention in high poverty schools.

Your school is being asked to take part in this study because you are currently educators in a high poverty school district in Georgia. If you should agree to participate in this study, you will be contacted in the latter part of 2009 and asked to provide the names of all of your teachers who have worked for two through five consecutive years at \_\_\_\_\_ School. The teachers will then be selected by the researcher and contacted for individual interviews. The interviews will take place at \_\_\_\_\_ School either before or after school hours and will in no way impact the instructional day. If your teachers agree to participate in this study you may be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview to discuss the challenges these teachers face and the opportunities that allow for longevity in your school. The school and all participants' names will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to report all findings in this study

I would like to thank you for your consideration in this matter and if you are willing to participate in this study. Please sign the informed consent section below and contact me at 706-833-7072. You may also contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at Georgia Southern University at 1-912-478-0843 about your rights as a research participant or if you have any concerns or questions regarding this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ My school and I are willing to participate in this study with Karen Davis

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX C (continued)  
Interview Questions for Principal

Research Question 2

What challenges do teachers encounter in high poverty schools?

1. Describe the working conditions at your school.
2. What are some obstacles that cause some teachers not to be successful?
3. Have you had teachers leave your school? Explain their reasons

Research Question 4

What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?

1. Describe an experience when a teacher told you she was satisfied with the way you handled a problem she had in her class.
2. Can you tell me about professional learning opportunities offered in your school or district?
3. What do you look for in potential candidates who apply for positions?
4. Describe the way you lead and empower your staff.
5. Can you tell me about student discipline in your school?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, INFORMED CONSENT AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR  
SUPERINTENDENT

## APPENDIX D

## Interview Protocol for Superintendent

## 1. Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study under the director of Dr. Barbara Mallory, of the Department of Educational Leadership, Georgia Southern University. Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary.

## 2. Why is this study being done?

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are currently a teacher in a high poverty school in a desired Georgia school district. The research will be done at your place of employment.

The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools.

A total of 10 participants will be asked to take part in this study. Two teachers with two or more consecutive years of teaching from four high poverty schools (2 elementary, 1 middle and 1 high) will be asked to participate. The principal with the lowest teacher retention rate from the selected four high poverty schools and, you, the superintendent make up the total participants of this study.

## 3. What is involved in this study?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will participate in one interview. The following activities are specifically research related: signing the consent form and participating in the interview.

The amount of time you will spend in connection with this study is one hour.

The interview will be audio recorded.

## 4. What are the risks of participating in this study?

There are no physical risks associated with this study. However, some of the questions that will be asked may be uncomfortable for you to answer. You may refuse to answer any of the questions at any time during this study. You also may stop participation in this study at anytime with penalty.

## APPENDIX D (continued)

## Interview Protocol for Superintendent

Every effort will be taken to ensure confidentiality in this study. All results or data from this study will be presented with fake names and pseudonyms. Your identity will be kept confidential unless required by law.

## 5. What are the benefits of taking part in this study?

You will not benefit directly from this study. However, the benefit could be to one specific Georgia school system as well as the educational community in general in a more detailed understanding of why teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools.

## 6. Problems or questions

The Educational Leadership Department of Georgia Southern University, at telephone number, 912-478-2647, can provide additional information about your rights as a participant in this research project. Further information regarding this study can be obtained by contacting Karen Davis at telephone 706-833-7072.

## 7. Documentation of informed consent

The information and the details of this study have been explained and my questions up until this point have been answered by Karen Davis. I will take a few minutes and read the consent form provided to me by Karen Davis. My signature on the consent form gives my permission to continue this interview and have it audio taped. I fully understand that I am giving my consent to participate in this study and I may withdraw from this study without penalty at anytime.

## APPENDIX D (continued)

## Informed Consent Letter for Superintendent



**College of Graduate Studies**  
**Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development**

Superintendent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

October 13, 2009

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Karen Davis and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I will be completing data collection for my dissertation in the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2010. I am conducting a study on why teachers sustain employment in high poverty schools in order to learn more about teacher retention. It is the researcher's epistemological belief that this study will provide a more detailed analysis of teacher retention in high poverty schools.

Your school system is being asked to take part in this study because you are currently a high poverty school district in Georgia. If your school system should agree to participate in this study, five of your schools will be contacted in the latter part of 2009. The principal's will be asked to provide the names of all of their teachers who have worked for two through five consecutive years at \_\_\_\_\_ School. The teachers will then be selected by the researcher and contacted for individual interviews. The interviews will take place at \_\_\_\_\_ School either before or after school hours and will in no way impact the instructional day. If the school system agrees to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview to discuss the challenges these teachers face and the opportunities that allow for longevity in your school system. The system, schools and all participants' names will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to report all findings in this study.

I would like to thank you for your consideration in this matter and if you are willing to participate in this study. Please sign the informed consent section below and contact me at 706-833-7072. You may also contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at Georgia Southern University at 1-912-478-0843 about your rights as a research participant or if you have any concerns or questions regarding this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ My school system and I are willing to participate in this study with Karen Davis

Superintendent's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D (continued)

## Interview Questions for Superintendent

## Research Question 2

What challenges do teacher encounter in high poverty schools?

1. Describe the working conditions in your district.
2. What are some obstacles that cause teachers not to be successful? Are these more prevalent in high poverty schools?
3. Have you had teachers leave your district? Do you know what the reasons were for leaving?

## Research Question 4

What opportunities exist that alleviate challenges and create conditions for satisfaction in high poverty schools?

1. What does your district look for in potential teacher and administrator candidates who apply to your district?
2. Can you tell me about some initiatives your district has tried or will try in order to retain teachers?
3. Can you explain as superintendent how you hear the concerns and attempt to create satisfaction for staff at all levels?
4. Can you explain the instructional and professional learning focus in your district?
5. Can you tell me about an experience where a teacher who teaches in a high poverty school told you she was satisfied after she brought a problem or concern to you that she had in her classroom?




APPENDIX E

The EVOLUTION OF CODES TO SUB CODES TO THEMES TO MAJOR FINDINGS

**APPENDIX E**  
**Codes to Sub codes to Themes to Major Findings**

<b>Codes</b> ↓	Working Conditions	Administration	Student Discipline	*Relationship to Other Adults	*Relationships with Students	*Relationship to Self
<b>Sub Codes</b> ↓	Student Deficits	Supportive Principal	Student Disrespect	Administrative Support	Needs of the Children	Teacher where I need to be
	Parental Involvement	Principal as the Leader/Professional/Disciplinary	Firm Beliefs/High Expectations	Strong colleague support and helping one another	Expectations for Behavior and Academics	Teaching is a Calling/Love of Teaching
	Lack of Resources	Respect for Principal	Non Negotiables for Student Behavior	Failure is not an option for the grade level or department	Love for Children	Selfness of the Teacher
	Negative experiences turned to positive with time and support	Negative Administration/No Support	Inconsistent student behavior	Collaboration and communication is critical with colleagues	Meeting the Needs of the Children	Need to see the Accomplishment of Students
		Understanding Administration	Behavior addressed	Negative Teacher Attitudes	Success/Accomplishments of the Students	Faith in God/Prayer/Relationship
		Competent	Frustration felt by teachers for poor discipline	Feeling Alone/Not accepted	Belief in the Students	Commitment as a person to student
			Fearful/Fighting/Physical and Verbal Attacks	Encouragement from family/pastor	Serving the Students	Commitment as a person to the job/profession
				Encouragement from colleagues	Challenging Relationship with Students/Tired/Frustration/Difficult	Similar backgrounds as students
<b>Themes</b> ↓	Working Conditions are challenging for the teachers	Administrative support and understanding was critical for teachers to remain in these schools	Student discipline created challenging conditions for these teachers. Carol	Teachers needed a Sense of Belonging to the School/Grade level or Department	Children were challenging with a variety of needs but teachers met the needs of the students and loved them. Sally	Critical to have Communication and collaboration among colleagues
	Given time each teacher would create a way to overcome the difficult working conditions.	Teachers need a fair administrator who handles discipline and is competent.	Teachers had high expectations for student behavior and communicated them to the students with love and respect	Support and Help from Other Adults was Important.	Teachers became a servant teacher wanted to serve the students and see them succeed.	Teachers needed a Sense of Belonging to the School/Grade level or Department

<b>Themes</b> 			Love shown by these teachers helped dissolve discipline issues Sally	Teachers had a team feeling that the Team would not fail.	Teachers had high expectations for the students and built loving and respectful relationship with these students.	Support and Help from Other Adults was Important
					These teachers feel that they must meet these students where they are and create relationships in order to remove any obstacles the students face so the students can have an opportunity for success.	Teachers had a team feeling that the Team would not fail.
						These teachers are committed to the students and their jobs.
<b>Major Findings</b>	<b>Positive relationships (teacher to student, teacher to self, and teacher to other adults), loyalty to the students and self determination were the major findings in this research study.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher to Student-These teachers built relationships first with the students and loved and believed in their students. The relationship with the students became important in these teachers' lives. They worked diligently and removed the obstacles these students faced.</li> <li>• Teacher to Self-These teachers were committed and felt self accomplishment when the students' succeeded. The servant nature of these teachers came out as they gave of their own time and resources to ensure the students succeeded. Finally, they felt a sense of belonging in these schools because of the relationships.</li> <li>• Teacher to Other Adults-These teachers endured challenges but the support, collaboration and communication was extremely important in their relationships to other adults.</li> <li>• Teachers were loyal to the students they served.</li> <li>• Teachers also had a sense of self determination where they saw teaching as a challenge and failure was not an option.</li> </ul>					