Increasing Teacher Retention in Today's American Schools

Trevor M. Creeden
Cedarville University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/education_theses
Part of the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/education_theses/50

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Education Research Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.
INCREASING TEACHER RETENTION IN TODAY’S AMERICAN SCHOOLS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education

By

TREVOR MICHAEL CREEDEN
B.S. Public Administration, Cedarville University, 2001

2008
Cedarville University
CEDARVILLE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

December 1, 2008


William E. Brown, Ph.D.
President

Pamela Johnson
Dean, School of Social Science
And Human Performance

Stephen S. Gruber, Ed.D.
Director, M.Ed. Program
For schools in today’s society to hold on to good teachers that the students learn well from and parents respect is becoming more and more difficult year after year. The students of today are very different than they were 15 to 20 years ago and there is too much pressure to perform from administrators today than in the past. This study is intended to inform and make both public and private schools aware of the factors that affect teacher retention and several ways schools can increase teacher retention at their own school. This qualitative study focuses more on finding out why teachers want to stay at a school rather than the reasons they desire to leave. A sample of 20 teachers who have been teaching at least one class every day for five or more years at Hilton Head Christian Academy were interviewed for this study. A focus group was then conducted after the individual interviews.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I: Introduction</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem or Issue</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of Study and Delimitations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Procedure</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II: Plenary Literature Review</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of Teacher Retention/Attrition in American Schools</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Factors That Affect Teacher Retention</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary/Compensation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Support</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring/Induction</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture/Climate</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Fit</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Hiring</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER III: Methodology</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of Method</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for the Method</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population of Study</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Criteria</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Introduction

The quality of the teacher is the most significant issue in whether the children of today are receiving the best education they possibly can – and the best way to measure the quality of the teaching are the years of experience the children’s teacher has (Jalongo & Heider, 2006). The prestige of the teaching profession today is not high when being viewed upon by those that are outside the profession (Inman & Marlow, 2004). Even if a teacher starts out in the profession with every intention of staying, those in the community view teaching as an occupation that will lead to other jobs in the profession or in other occupations outside of education (Krieg, 2004). Science and math teachers especially are ones that can find a higher paying salary in another profession (Murname, Singer & Willett, 1989). If teachers are not given support from the beginning and are made aware of the positives of the occupation, they will look for other job opportunities that will meet their strengths, but most importantly, where they feel they are supported (Inman & Marlow, 2004)

It is important in today’s society that we do our best to cultivate and retain teachers who are passionate about their profession and are committed to providing today’s youth with a solid education (O’Conner, 2004). Since most of this passion is already evident in individuals before they become teachers, the preparation programs that future teachers are involved in become a vital aspect to how successful they will become as teachers (Chapman, 1984). These programs in undergraduate level education programs could be a way to weed out the students who are not really committed to the profession and be able to really support and provide confidence to the students who are serious about being quality and effective teachers (Chapman, 1984). In a study
done by Marshall and Marshall in 2003, changes such as requiring a more practical classroom management class, the time education students spend on field-based classroom activities, and starting these activities before their junior year are all effective ways to strengthen the preparation potential teachers will have before they face the many challenges that come in their first few years of teaching. Other factors that are important in the preparation of teachers are to make sure the appropriate funds from the state are being utilized correctly at the various institutions that have education programs throughout the state and having the Colleges of Education throughout the United States promote their most qualified, experienced, full-professors to be the ones teaching the students in the elementary and secondary education programs (Greiner & Smith, 2006).

If the quality of the education at the undergraduate level increases before teachers enter the classroom, it will prevent administrators from putting teachers in classrooms who are not yet ready to handle the pressures and complicated issues that face first-year teachers (Arnold, Moore, Schriver & Worsham, 2003). In a study by Ingersoll in 1997, forty-one percent of all middle and high school students that were in either chemistry, physics, earth or space science were being instructed by teachers who did not have a major or minor in the subject area they were teaching. Student’s enrolled in high school and middle school math classes were being instructed by teachers who do not obtain the appropriate degree to be teaching them either (Ingersoll, 2007).

In order for teachers to have pleasure in what they do, they must be experiencing a certain level of satisfaction that they belong in the teaching profession and have an aspiration to make a difference in their student’s lives (Huysman, 2008). This satisfaction can come from a number of different directions and may not be the same for everyone, but a one of the big factors
that encourages job satisfaction is the ability to be mentored early on in a teacher’s career by an experienced teacher (Leimann, Murdoch & Waller, 2008). It is crucial for young teachers to have this support system right when they enter the school (Katkus, 2007). Mentoring is not just making sure a new teacher is surviving, but it should be a daily exchange of questions, advice and just listening to the other person that convinces the new teacher that they can be an effective and influence their students (Woods & Weasmer, 2004).

Teacher satisfaction is also a by-product of having good relationships with their colleagues within their school, being able to be heard and listened to when they have a conflict or frustration, chances for professional development when the desire is there to enhance their skills, and being able to obtain encouraging feedback from their students (Reynolds & Wang, 2005). Factors that hinder a teachers satisfaction and therefore, lead to big drops in teacher retention are unsupportive work conditions, lack of interaction with colleagues, little opportunities for professional development, not being part of the decision making, lack of administrative support and little help when it comes to student discipline (Certo & Fox, 2002). Comparing teachers who stay with teachers that leave, those who stay can do a better job of leaning on those things that are good about the profession (Shen, 1997).

The perception these teachers that stay tends to be that they have some control over policies at the school and they have a good relationship with their administrators (Shen, 1997). Teachers who continue in the position at the school they teach at tend to have a strong satisfaction for their job, while those that are dissatisfied, are likely to leave the school or the teaching profession altogether (Cook, 2002). Even though teachers in public schools may leave for different reasons than those teaching in private schools, a number of the reasons each leave their schools will be the same as well (Ingersoll, 2001).
Supportive administration – The administration in a school that possesses the ability to provide support for what they expect their teachers to do and allow their teachers the ability to be treated as professionals in their field (Certo & Fox, 2002).

Teacher security – When teachers do not have to worry about either being released at the end of the school year for various reasons or being put in a different position at the school that they feel unqualified to teach in (Certo & Fox, 2002).

Social network – Teacher’s interaction with their colleagues that allows them the opportunity to receive feedback to help them be better teachers in the future, gives them an opportunity to express their frustrations and concerns, and provides them an opportunity to work together (Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis & Parker, 2000).

Mentoring – A program where brand-new beginning teachers are matched up with an experienced teacher so that the new teacher can ask questions, listen to advice and just have a someone there that cares for them and guides them during their beginning years in the profession of teaching (Leimann, Murdoch & Waller, 2008).

Qualified teacher – A teacher that has the proper credentials, qualifications and certification in the subject are that they are assigned to teach (Greiner & Smith, 2006).

Teaching Experience – The total number of academic calendar years that a teacher has instructed students in the classroom (Inman & Marlow, 2004).

Teacher Morale – The confidence or optimism teachers receive through the way certain issues such as discipline policies to academic support are handled throughout the school (Ingersoll, 1997).
Professional Development – Opportunities that the school provides for their teachers to learn new methods of teaching, expand their curriculum, or receive training to teach a more difficult level of instruction such as honors or Advanced Placement classes (Reynolds & Wang, 2005).

Job satisfaction – When a teacher enjoys what they do because the positives outweigh the negatives in the areas that affect teacher retention (Kim & Loadman, 1994).

Small private school – A school in the private sector that has less than 300 students (Ingersoll, 2001).

Large private school - A school in the private sector that has more than 300 students.

Association of Christian International (ACSI) – A Christian organization that accredits private, Christian high schools around the United States in order for those respective high schools to be college preparatory.

Statement of the Problem or Issue

Our nation is facing a crisis where it becomes tougher and tougher to keep experienced, qualified and effective teachers at the school they are teaching at or even in the field of education as a whole. Those who decide to make the transition to teach at another school or leave the profession altogether usually do so in the first five years of teaching because of reasons such as the inability to advance, frustrations over salary, less time for themselves during the school year, and the inordinate amount of time spend on lesson plans and supervising students (MacDonald, 1995). Almost 540,000 teachers migrated to another school or left teaching altogether in 2000 (Carroll & Fulton, 2004). It is estimated that 3.5 million new teachers will need to be hired by
2013 due to a large jump in enrollment in public schools and to replace those teachers that are retiring (Hull, 2004).

We are in a time as a nation where it is a necessity to have effective, quality teachers, but instead, we are struggling to find teachers, especially in the areas of math, science and special education, that have a desire to make a difference in the lives of today’s youth and tackle the challenges of the profession (Certo & Fox, 2002). Administrators are attending career fairs in education today and are having a hard time even talking to enough qualified and eager potential teachers when in the past these fairs used to be so busy and competitive (Worsham, Arnold, Schriver & Moore, 2003). Wu and Short (1996) observed that educators start to question the intent, goals and influence of political leaders and administrators when they are faced with new challenges as education continues to change year in and year out in our nation. When these challenges are imposed on educators, their commitment to the classroom becomes limited and in effect, the expectations of their student’ performance in the classroom diminishes as well (Wu and Short, 1996).

In Darling-Hammond’s (2003) research, the four major reasons for leaving the profession or transferring to another school are: 1) low-salaries, 2) unsatisfactory working conditions, 3) inadequate preparation, 4) and lack of mentoring support from the beginning. Experienced teachers tend to migrate or leave the profession early because of reasons such as accountability pressures, increased paperwork, bad attitudes of the students, under-or-over-involvement of parents, lack of support from administration, frustrations with salary, and the low status of the profession in today’s society (Tye & O’Brien, 2002).
The particular area of teacher retention that I will be focusing on is schools in the private sector that are religious rather than public schools. Turnover rates in private schools across the nation, of which 70 percent are religious, are almost double the turnover rates of public schools (Whitener, Gruber, Lynch, Tingoes, Perona & Fondelier, 1997). While both public and private schools face similar challenges like administrative support, lack of parental involvement, and amount of paperwork, small private schools have different challenges and benefits than those that teach in the public sector. Where class size, relationship with a union, and trouble with discipline may be big enough factors for those that teach in public schools to migrate to another school or leave the profession, those teaching in private schools may face a whole different set of challenges. In the private school arena, the major challenge that teachers face are low salary, benefits, and lack of opportunities for professional development.

Nevertheless, teachers at small private schools tend to leave the teaching profession at twice the rate that even teacher in inner-city public schools do (Ingersoll, 2001). Because private and religious school teachers tend not to get support from a union, have the possibility of receiving tenure or have the benefit of a set pay scale like those teachers in public schools, the turnover and retention rates are always going to be higher these schools.

Scope of Study and Delimitations

In this study I am interviewing teachers in private, Christian schools who have been teaching for at least five years or more consecutively at the school they are teaching at. After teaching in the same position for five years, teachers have been able to confront and overcome the major challenges that face beginning teachers, and have established themselves in their positions enough to be receiving enough administrative support to keep them satisfied while
feeling like they have been heard enough when they get frustrated or concerned on a certain issue (Katkus, 2007). In essence, these teachers with five or more years of experience have weighed the positives and the negatives in the position they are in at the school they are teaching at and have found that the positives outweigh the negatives at the point in time they are at in their teaching career. I will not be interviewing any teachers that have only been teaching for four years or less.

The schools that I will be interviewing these teachers at are large, private, Christian, non-denominational schools that are accredited with Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). I will not be interviewing teachers from public schools since they may face some different challenges than that of private school teachers. I will not be interviewing any teachers that teach at private schools, but are not Christian schools. For this study the determinant factor of whether a school is Christian or not is due to the fact that they are accredited with Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). The information that I will be asking for from these teachers in the interviews will be pertaining to why they choose to stay in the current position they have been teaching in up until the time of the interview. I will not be focusing as much on the negative aspects of their job or why teachers may leave, but rather what are the factors teachers like themselves choose to remain in the profession.

Significance of Study

With teacher retention and migration always being a major issue in today’s private schools, it is particularly important for administrators to understand the factors of why teachers who have chosen to stay in the profession do stay and not leave after the first few years. Once these factors are realized and understood by administrators, those individuals that are responsible
for the hiring of teachers in their school will be able to hire teachers that will succeed and stay in the profession for at least five years, know what teachers expect from the administration in order to have satisfaction in what they are doing, and be able to provide teachers with the best teaching environment they possibly can so that the teachers themselves consider their profession as a lifetime career. A big factor that administrators need to understand is that the hiring of teachers in their school may be just as important as how you treat those teachers once they are there. If the right teachers are not hired, then schools are at a disadvantage right from the beginning. The likelihood of a teacher staying at a school past their first year goes down significantly if they should have not been hired in the first place.

The results of this study will also be beneficial for current teachers as well in that they will be made more aware of important issues that are the basis for teachers to want to migrate or leave the profession. Teachers understand that they cannot have everything they need or want because no school is going to provide the perfect teaching or learning environment. Nonetheless, if the positives outweigh the negatives when teachers evaluate their positions, the chances of them continuing in that position and staying at the school they are teaching at become much greater. The most significant reason to conduct this study, however, is to make sure that the best qualified and quality teachers that are passionate about the subject they teach and their students are teaching the children of today’s generation. If teachers who desire to make an impact on the youth of today are satisfied and happy in their profession, this satisfaction will flow to their students who are the biggest beneficiary of this study.
Methods of Procedure

Research questions:

1. What is the most difficult year as a teacher? Why?

2. At any point up to now in your teaching career did you want to quit? At what point was that?

3. What are the positive factors in your job as a teacher that have caused you to remain in your position five years or more?

4. What are the negative factors in your job as a teacher that have caused you to want to quit or migrate?

5. What advice would you give a first-year teacher with the intention of making sure they stay in the profession at least five years?

6. Are there any extrinsic factors that you feel make you stay in the position that you are in?

7. Did you have a mentor when you first started teaching? How did this relationship help you to continue teaching?

8. Have you ever wanted to leave teaching or teach at another school because someone else or a number of others were leaving?

9. What ideas do you have in order to help your administration retain teachers?

I will be conducting a qualitative research study that is phenomenological in its approach. I will be interviewing at least 20 teachers from Hilton Head Christian Academy as my sample from the population of teachers. After conducting a histogram to determine at what number of years experience I would get the largest sample of teachers from, I have decided to do a
standardized open-ended interview with those teachers who have taught for at least five years or more. After conducting individual interviews I will then conduct a focus group to look at how teachers think about the topic of teacher retention when in a group setting. I will serve as the group moderator for the focus groups.

*Focus Group Interview Protocol*

1. If the first year is the hardest year for a teacher, what would be the two biggest things that can be done to make sure they make it through the year still excited about what they do?

2. I asked about the positives and negatives of teaching in your individual interviews. If you could pinpoint one thing that would make it or break it for you as far as returning year after year what would it be?

3. Why is the rate of teacher retention higher in private schools when compared to public schools?

4. When it comes to salary, are there any ways a private school can supplement teachers salaries?

5. What are the key characteristics you would look for if you wanted to hire a teacher that is going to be effective and successful?

6. What suggestions do you have to help those who hire teachers at your school so that these teachers will stay at least five years or more like yourselves?

7. Do you feel that Christian teachers really have two responsibilities? To teach whatever their subject matter is but also to teach their students about Christ?

8. Although unrealistic, what is your idea of the perfect administration when it comes to supporting its teachers?
After transcribing the interviews and collecting all the data from these interviews I will analyze the data by looking for themes. From this analysis I will be able to report what I feel are the major factors that affect teacher retention in private, Christian schools and suggestions for being able to improve this retention.
Chapter 2

Plenary Literature Review

The ability for schools in today's society to hold on to good teachers that the students learn well from and the parents respect is becoming more and more difficult. The students of today are very different than they were fifteen to twenty years ago and there is more pressure to perform from administrators today than in the past. This chapter is intended to help the reader understand research on the topic of teacher retention, attrition and on the related topics of what affects teacher retention in today's schools.

History of Teacher Retention/Attrition in American Schools

Schools that have a need for strong, qualified teachers is not a new problem. At times in the last half century, there have been shortages of teachers throughout the United States forcing those elected to state and local government positions to intervene and begin giving out temporary teaching credentials to those who are not qualified in the specific subject area they are going to teach in (Cochran-Smith, 2004). In the 1950's, there were a number of men entering the teaching profession (Markley, 2004). With the occurrences of Sputnik and the Cold War, the United States had a fear of their students not being as educated as the Soviet students so in turn, in order to compete with the Soviets; they had to find better teachers (Markley, 2004). For a number of years classrooms were filled with young teachers who majored in elementary or secondary education in college, graduated from college within four to six years, were passionate about their responsibility to educate our nation's youth, and began their teaching careers while in their early to mid-twenties (Brown, 2005).
Then in 1983, the *Nation At Risk Report* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) changed the educational landscape by telling the country that education was in trouble, and students were not learning and lacked even basic skills. Teachers began to be viewed as laborers teaching a curriculum put in place by policy makers rather than deciding for themselves how they best feel their students should learn. From the time that this report was published, rhetoric has continued regarding educational reform, accountability, and more importantly, the subject of attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers. This rhetoric has moved from the political podium culminating with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) federal legislation of 2001 (Huysman, 2008). NCLB has created a greater challenge for rural schools (Belsie, 2003).

All of a sudden in the early 1980’s, a series of highly publicized reports began to focus national attention on the possibility of severe teacher shortages in today’s schools (Darling-Hammond, 1984). In the mid-1980’s, estimates of teacher attrition ranged from 6 to 9% and were expected to rise through the 1990’s (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987). In the early 1990’s, the national rate of teacher attrition hovered around 14% (Ingersoll, 2001). Part of the problem with this attrition rate can perhaps be attributed to the changing role of women in the workplace and the expansion of professional opportunities for women. With the emergence of more lucrative positions for women now in the workplace, teaching, which was viewed as a “female” career, is no longer viewed in the same light as it once was (Blount, 1998). Also, more women today are deciding to raise families and work full-time at home. This is forcing more men into the teaching profession.

While it has been said that the reason for high teacher attrition and the low teacher retention is due to a large number of retirements and increased student enrollment since the mid-
1980’s, Richard Ingersoll argues that there are plenty of prospective teachers ready to enter today’s schools to begin or continue their teaching careers (2004). Now more and more teachers are beginning their teaching careers after already having had one or more experiences in other occupations and with them they bring preconceived biases and opinions that are shaped outside the teaching profession (Brown, 2005). These individuals are chasing after the higher salary and “better life” right out of college today and then deciding to come back and teach when they decide that they want to “make a difference.”

Some experts estimate that the attrition rate for beginning teachers hovers at 20-30% and may approach 50% in urban school districts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003). There is also a big difference in the turnover rate of teachers when it comes to the size and sector of school (Ingersoll, 2001). It is really an example of supply and demand. When there have been enough teachers in the workforce, having to replace teachers is not that much of a concern; however, when the supply of teachers is inadequate with shortages in various regions of the country and in certain subject areas, teacher attrition and retention becomes a huge concern (Jalongo & Heider, 2006).

Teacher turnover in private schools is a lot higher that that of public schools and within the private school sector, and smaller private schools especially have a harder time retaining their teachers than larger private schools do (Ingersoll, 2001). Consider these recent statistics:

- Forty-six percent of new teachers nationwide leave the profession within the first five years of service (Ingersoll, 2002a).
- Teacher attrition is considerably higher for teachers with emergency certificates, often ranging from 50-80% after two to three years (Johnson, 2006).
• Over 90% of the teachers who are hired in the United States today are replacements for teachers who have left for other reasons other than retirement (Ingersoll, 2002b).

• It is estimated that 3.5 million new teachers will need to be hired by 2013 to support increased enrollment in public schools and to replace retiring teachers (Hull, 2004).

• Nearly 540,000 teachers moved to other schools or left the teaching profession in 2000 (Carroll & Fulton, 2004).

• In regard to private schools, smaller private schools have the highest average levels of teacher turnover at about 23% compared to large private schools which average about 10% (Ingersoll, 2001).

Major Factors That Affect Teacher Retention

Salary/Compensation

Worldwide, not just in the United States, teacher’s salaries an important factor when having to do with teacher attrition or retention (Dove, 2004). In the United States, teachers’ salaries overall are about 20% below the salaries of other professionals with comparable education and training (Darling-Hammond, 2003). For example, data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that in 2001, the average teacher salary ($44,040) ranked below that of registered nurses ($48,240), accountants/auditors ($50,700), dental hygienists ($56,770), and computer programmers ($71,130). A survey conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) indicated that teachers with 16 years of experience only earned an average of about $40,000. Engineers with the same experience earned about $68,200, computer scientists $66,700 and accountants about $9,200 (Shure, 2001). Teaching in America’s elementary or secondary schools is one of the lowest entry-level positions in the United States today, and it is normal for
teachers with five or ten years experience to be earning less than recent graduates who have begun their careers right out of college (Budig, 2006).

Salary and benefits seem to be a much bigger reason to migrate or leave in private schools than in public schools (Cook & Engel, 2006). There is a difference in financial motivation to leave teaching when it comes to private and public schools. According to a study done by Leukens, Lyter and Fox in 2004, 29% of teachers in public schools reported leaving to retire and 20% each for opportunities for better salary and benefits. For private schools, only 11% reported leaving for retirement, 31% left for better salary and 28% left for better benefits. So it is no surprise that teachers respond positively to increased salaries.

If the teacher’s salary continues to increase and she/he feels they are valued with the amount of money they are making, the lower the likelihood that a teacher will quit or transfer (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2005). When a teacher feels like the school is investing what it can into them the teacher will in turn want to invest their best effort and motivation into their students (Shen, 1997). In schools in which there was a higher salary for teachers with master’s degrees and 20 years experience, teachers were more likely to stay (Shen, 1997). Salary is an important symbolic measure on how society views the effort one puts into their job (Kelly, 2004). With this in mind, teachers are enormously underpaid. Their relative standard of living is at its lowest in forty years. If the time teachers put into their job far exceeds what they have signed up to do in their contract, then they should be compensated appropriately or at least the administration needs to make every effort to work towards that end (Coeyman, Jonsson, Teicher & Wiltenburg, 2001).
Study after study in Missouri and other states show that salary is the major barrier to entering the profession (Hardy, 1998). No one ever said that getting into teaching would make one wealthy, but teachers should expect to have a life of economic dignity. Teachers should be able to purchase a home, send their children to college, and retire with enough assets to maintain a modest standard of living (Colb, 2001). In a study done by Susan Wynn, Wilson Carboni and Erika Patall in 2007, however, salary was the most frequently cited reason participants in the study left teaching. The results of their study indicate that salary (85%) was 24% higher than having disruptive students (58%), which was the next highest reason for leaving within the first two years of teaching.

While the issue of salary takes precedence over a number of other issues, compensation is an extrinsic factor that doesn’t paint the complete picture of why teachers decide to migrate or leave the profession (Cook & Engel, 2006). Unlike many professions, teaching is characterized by a high level of intrinsic rewards, such as attachment to the subject matter being taught, and secondary rewards, such as having summers and holidays off. These factors combine to motivate individuals who view a higher salary as a lower priority into teaching (Kottkamp, Provenso, & Cohn, 1986).

Administrative Support

Just as a teacher will choose to continue teaching at their school because of a good administration, they are just as prone to leave their school if they consider the administration to be unsupportive (Segan, 2000). This school-level administrative support can be defined as policies or practices present that supported teacher work and created an environment that treated teachers as professionals (Certo & Fox, 2002). When a teacher does not feel supported by the
administration at their school, stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction are most likely to result (Singh & Billingsley, 1996). An administration of a school should make every effort to partner with their new teachers by understanding and respecting each others roles and be willing to listen and learn from each other (Bobek, 2002).

While beginning teachers may mention many other reasons for exiting the profession such as salary, working conditions, lack of parent involvement, stifling bureaucratic school cultures – one of the most common reasons cited is the lack of administrative support (Hirsh, Koppich & Knapp, 2001). Administrators need to be careful of the workload and extra responsibilities that are put on new teachers and not overload them in their first year when they are taking on many new challenges already (Brown, 2005). At a school that is nurturing their new teachers in the appropriate way, you will see those teachers want to keep returning and as they come back year after year, they want to get more involved at the school (Malloy & Allen, 2007).

Principals play a vital role when it comes to retaining teachers. They can address many of the issues that relate to teachers’ attrition (Minarik, Thornton & Perrault, 2003). A principal can really make the difference between a group of teachers who are only there to do their job and leave at the end of the day or who become a community amongst themselves and begin to assist and encourage one another in their roles at educators (Quinn, 2005). Buckingham and Coffman (1999) reported findings from a Gallup Poll that indicated the single most important variable in staff productivity and loyalty is the quality of relationship between staff and their direct supervisors.
One of the most frequently mentioned types of support needed by teachers from their administration is for discipline issues (O’Connor, 2004). Teachers are going to lean on their administrators for assistance in discipline, parent involvement, staff development, teaching methods, academic decisions, and positive recognition for efforts (O’Connor, 2004). Teachers clearly look for strong, effective and organized administrations (O’Conner, 2004). Administrators must continue to promote teachers’ accomplishments to one another and to the educational community. Additionally, they must enhance the public perception of teaching as a true profession (Inman & Marlow, 2004). Regular, structured, faculty development opportunities should be provided so that beginning teachers have a forum in which to share ideas, learn ways of teaching which are similar, and become more familiar with school curriculum (Inman & Marlow, 2004).

One complaint of veteran teachers was that they had less and less say in the curriculum chosen for their classroom (Tye & O’Brien, 2002). When teachers are given the impression that they have some sort of influence over what happens in their classroom as far as curriculum goes, they are more likely to want to stay compared to those that feel they are always just told all the time what to do and teach to their students (Katkus, 2007). Kim and Loadman (1994) proposed that if administrators can stay involved in the daily activities of their teacher and make sure they are showing them they care, they will more than likely be able to identify the job satisfaction level of their teachers and be able to intervene when it is low or even too high so they can maintain that level.

Having teachers be recognized through an ongoing teacher recognition program and applauded for their efforts go a long way in having them want to stay as well (Huysman, 2008). Teachers who are successful normally enjoy a high level of social interaction, but there are also
those teachers who require a positive social feedback in order for them to maintain their job satisfaction. If they do not get this positive feedback it may cause them to want to leave the school (Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis & Parker, 2000). Being able to bring in and then retain good teachers is a procedure that needs to come from the “inside” of the school. When the administration of a school can encourage teacher involvement relating to the direction of the school itself, the administration and teachers are becoming partners in actively improving working conditions.

Nevertheless, it needs to start by the administration making their particular institution a great place to work and be able to foster that by providing opportunities to grow through professional development (Jalongo & Heider, 2006). For the community to have the opportunity to support its teachers and give them a sense of belonging, it is going to take cooperation between the school administration, other teachers, teacher education programs and the people within the community (Inman & Marlow, 2004). The more an administration gets to know a teacher’s strengths and weaknesses and the teacher finds their niche within the school community, the more likely they are to stay. Teachers who stayed in their positions were almost four times as likely to sense that they are receiving administrative support and encouragement than those who left (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt & Weber, 1998).

**Mentoring/Induction**

Traditionally, new teachers have entered the teaching field by being thrown into the “fire” and seeing how they are going to survive (Ingersoll, 2003). However, this transition into a new school or into the teaching profession altogether can be made a lot easier by the proper use and implementation of induction or mentoring programs (Wynn, Carboni & Patall, 2007). The
establishment of mentoring programs, made available to the beginning teachers for a certain number of years following graduation from college, can also provide the beginning teacher with personal encouragement, assistance in curriculum development, advice about lesson plans, and feedback about teaching (Inman & Marlow, 2004). It has been found that teachers who were not given the opportunity to participate in a mentoring/induction program when they first started teaching or moved to a new school, were twice as likely to leave as those who did participate in one (Johnson, 2006).

While there is an association between receiving induction or mentoring support and the increased likelihood of retaining quality teachers, the real strength of this relationship depends on the type and number of support systems that a beginning teacher receives (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Nevertheless, this support system that is established is vital for a beginning or new teacher to have early in their career at a specific school (Katkus, 2007).

For teachers in their first year of teaching, two types of mentoring support are necessary: psychological support and instruction-related support. Psychological support addresses the most pressing personal and emotional needs of teachers, though it does not necessarily impact the quality of teaching (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Instruction-related support provides a means by which the most inexperienced teacher can learn and assume the most basic challenges of instruction that a beginning teacher faces (Mutchler, 2000). This type of support includes helping beginners learn about the fundamentals of lesson planning, school rules, and classroom management (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

Only one percent, however, of new teachers currently receives the training and support assistance necessary for a proper induction into a school (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). One way to
make sure the support and training of a mentor teacher continues is to give that mentor teacher a lighter teaching load (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Smith & Ingersoll (2003) analyzed the impact of mentoring and induction programs on retention of new teachers. They found a clear relationship between participation by beginning teachers in these programs and the likelihood of their retention. Ingersoll (2003) also reported that teachers who participated in a full induction program had a statistically significant impact. The induction program included common planning time with other teachers in their subject area, supportive communication with school administrators and reduced course preparations.

According to a 1998 federal study, a typical new teacher receives less than eight hours of professional support a year (Camphire, 2002). With such little understanding of how children grow, how they learn, and what to do to encourage student learning, these poorly prepared teachers may be less likely to understand student learning styles, or anticipate instructional issues, or plan effectively to help students (Quinn, 2005). They may also be less likely to take responsibility for teaching students, and more likely to play the blame game of pointing fingers at parents, administrators and students themselves for their own lack of training (Quinn, 2005).

Another component of teacher mentoring programs is for the mentor to influence the future teachers they are paired with to either encourage a commitment to teaching or to encourage those who did not come into the field of teaching with a lot of commitment to maybe look at alternative careers (Chapman, 1984). An effective mentoring program is going to focus on developing and allowing a teacher to consistently improve, build on, and allow them to tweak their methods and practices in the classroom so their students will learn effectively and efficiently (Mutchler, 2000).
A real positive of incorporating a mentoring program at your school is that it will benefit both the beginning or new teacher and also the mentor. While the novice teacher learns from their experienced colleague, the veteran teacher is going to refine their own skills by learning the latest approaches to literacy, instruction, and integrating technology just to name a few (Quinn, 2005). The mentoring assignments given to the experienced teachers gave them recognition as experts in their field, improved their own teaching, got them excited about learning the latest strategies and techniques in their field, and even helped to reduce any job burnout they may have been experiencing at the time (Johnson, 2006). The first goal of mentoring should not be to retain teachers, but instead, the goal should be to develop effective teachers who learn effective teaching strategies (Glover & Mutchler, 2000). Research has indicated that a good, structured, and organized mentoring program is a very important catalyst into making sure the new teachers at a school will stay after the first few years (Katkus, 2007).

**School Culture/Climate**

Satisfaction with the school culture has been seen as the most influential factor in remaining with the school (Whitner, 1997). One very important factor of school culture is the working conditions within the school. The principal of the school has a majority of the influence on this aspect of school culture (Wynn, Carboni & Patall, 2007). Weiss (1999) found that schools with supportive climate characterized by collaboration and teacher participation in decision making were related to a greater commitment to teaching and intention to remain in the profession for first-year teachers. Schools that serve lower-income or lower-achieving students have higher attrition rates (Darling-Hammond, 2003).
A California survey found that teachers in schools serving high numbers of poor minority students reported poorer working conditions than those typically found in higher-wealth schools. The working conditions that were reported included inferior facilities, lack of supplies, inadequate administration support, and larger class sizes. Notably teachers were more likely to indicate they intended to leave the school if the working conditions were poor (Harris, 2002). Large class sizes make it difficult on the teacher to coordinate learning activities in an effective way, but also be able to stay on task with what the lesson is that day because there may be kids with different learning abilities in the class (Certo & Fox, 2002).

Relationships also play an important role in the atmosphere within a school. The relationships that teachers make with their students and colleagues have much more influence on their decision stay at a school (Katkus, 2007). In a study done by Katkus (2007), he observes that not one of the teachers he interviewed mentioned pay, stress or responsibilities as reasons for wanting to leave. However, several of the teachers he interviewed made a point that the good relationships they had with colleagues helped them to get through the times in their teaching careers that they would have seriously considered leaving.

Even if the school climate and facilities at a school may be sub par, if a teacher is satisfied or content with the classroom they teach in they will more than likely not use school climate/culture as a main reason they decide to leave (Liu & Meyer, 2005). The students in their classrooms though, may play a big factor into whether a teacher will want to leave. When a teacher has a number of disruptive students in their class as well as parents who are uninvolved, this will contribute significantly to the attrition of teachers. To stay in teaching today, teachers need school conditions where they are successful and supported (Cochran-Smith, 2004).
Even a casual examination into most schools will generally reveal that teachers must schedule all breaks (lunch and bathroom), sign in and out of the workplace, have limited access to the school building unless the children are present, and conduct bus, playground, lunch, and hall duty. Additionally, few have private offices, time for private calls or to confer with colleagues. Research shows that dissatisfaction related to these aspects of teaching are ones that approximately two-thirds of teachers and former teachers cite as a reason for leaving the profession (Spears, Gould, & Lee, 2000). We need to keep in mind though that a positive and supportive school environment in itself complete with administrative support is not enough to support a teacher that is struggling in the classroom (Yost, 2006).

Organizational Fit

Any school needs to do what they can to cultivate relationships within its faculty. Research on school principals has identified the difficulty of fitting into an organization. Teachers must figure out how to collaborate and interact with other teachers in a positive way at the school, but yet make sure they are being distinct enough so that they are a part of the growth and development of the school. Just as human beings in our own right, we want to communicate and interact with one another so that we can get more familiar with each other (Minarik, Thornton & Perrault, 2003). According to Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996), organizations can do all they want to try and encourage people to stay in their organization such as incentive, rewards, pay, etc. These organizations could accomplish a whole lot more though if they just concentrated on the importance of people interacting, relating to and developing long-lasting relationships with one another. Instinctively, if an employee has worked on and developed good, strong, long-lasting relationships with other employees as well as with the organization, the more
difficult it becomes for them to think that they should or could go and work somewhere else (Ahlrichs, 2000).

This is especially important in schools. There are schools, however, where most teachers are isolated and have very little professional contact with one another. These are circumstances that strongly relate to the retention and attrition of teachers (Collins, 1999). If the intrinsic rewards are consistently a priority for any school whether it is through the connectedness between teachers, relationships built between teachers and their administration or just cooperative professional interaction, the attrition rate will almost certainly increase at that school (Minarik, Thornton & Perrault, 2003). Teachers do feel like they want to stay at a school when the school begins to feel like a “family” (Certo & Fox, 2002).

In a study done by Katkus (2007), it was found that shaping relationships with other teachers and also with students ranked high as far as the good aspects of being a teacher. A teacher is going to be by nature a “people person,” so for a school administration to make sure they are nurturing this quality is crucial to the success of making sure their teachers stay. The type of climate at your school though, may be different than a climate at another school depending on the location, size, sect, or student body makeup of the school.

**Teacher Hiring**

The single strongest predictor to retention is the initial commitment to teaching that a teacher possesses (Chapman, 1984). In a study done by Ingersoll (1997), over one quarter of all secondary school students enrolled in math classes are taught by teachers who do not have either a college major or minor in math or math education. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics cites that the nation has been hiring teachers at a rate of two million “new” teachers per decade.
When this view is taken into context with other data that indicates forty % of today’s teachers were leaving the profession within the first three years, and up to fifty % leaving within the first five years, it is easy to understand that while there may be certified teachers, they are not showing up in the classrooms (Coeymann, Jonsson, Teicher & Wiltenburg, 2001).

If the administrator responsible for hiring teachers at their school has the time and a large number of potential teachers applying to teach at their school, they would no doubt do their best to select the best candidates for the job (Minarik, Thornton & Perreault, 2003). The best candidates for the job may be different depending on who the administrator is and the school itself. If administrators can find those teachers that they determine to be quality teachers, the probability of retaining these teachers will be a lot higher (Minarik, Thornton & Perreault, 2003).

There are administrators who want experience over youth or want teachers with advanced degrees over those coming right out of college with a bachelor’s degree, but there need to be certain qualities in a teacher that are true for any school. The following are key characteristics for a school when looking for an effective teacher.

**Positive Attitude** – A teacher should come in to school every day thinking positively about their students and confident that each of their students can succeed with themselves playing a crucial role in that success (Cruickshank, Jenkins & Metcalf, 2003). Being able to praise their students for their individual achievements no matter how small they are and keeping them excited about what they are learning is very important (Borich, 2000).

**Preparedness** – A teacher that is well-prepared is going to have less behavioral issues to deal with because they feel they can take the time to address those issues and still stay on task. If the
Forgiving – Every teacher is not going to have the perfect relationship with every student. There are going to be those students that teachers just have personality conflicts with. How teachers handle these relationships is important to their success. A teacher that is struggling is going to label students and those labels can last for the whole year. For a teacher to forgive students for their misbehavior and be able to have a fresh start to each day is important (Thompson, Greer & Greer, 2004).

Summary

It is very costly to have high turnover when it comes to teachers at a school. Not only does it affect things monetarily, but it also is going to affect other administrators and current teachers’ time to hire and train new teachers, cohesion within the school and community, teaching effectiveness and students’ achievement since they are the ones having to adjust to the new teachers the most being in the classroom with them each and every day (Ingersoll, 2003). In the end, good teachers are going to stay in teaching- even in the most difficult of circumstances and with the most diversified students because they have a passion for kids and a heart to serve and make a difference in the lives of their students (Nieto, 2003).

Teachers today are different than the previous generation of teachers for reasons such as a) a couple decades ago there were fewer opportunities for women and people of color, b) teaching was a more respected profession, and c) most teachers entered through the same route and expected to stay in the classroom (Johnson, 2006). If we take a closer look at the experiences of new teachers who enter from different paths, stay in, move within, and leave the profession, we see that the situation in today’s day and age is not completely a problem of being able to retain teachers, but a generational perspective that requires a re-evaluation of career
expectations, career paths, and the way schools are run and organized (Johnson, 2004). Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) sums up the issue of teacher retention by saying that “teacher retention is a multidimensional problem, requiring both macro- and micro-level analyses and policy initiatives. These will need to address teacher recruitment and entry requirements, teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning, the cultures and conditions of schools, the rewards and incentives of teaching, the definition of teaching career paths, and the balance between teacher autonomy and teacher accountability” (390).
Chapter 3

Methodology

*Introduction of the Method*

For this study, qualitative research was performed that is phenomenological in its approach. Standardized open-ended interviews were conducted with those teachers who have taught one class every day for at least five years or more at Hilton Head Christian Academy. After conducting individual interviews, I then conducted a focus group to look at how teachers think about the topic of teacher retention when in a group setting. I served as the group moderator for the focus group. Each teacher that agreed to participate in the study was contacted one week in advance before the interviewing was to begin. An interview guide approach was used for the interviews since I came into the interviews with specific questions and the intent to explore specific topics with the interviewee. The entire study lasted four weeks.

Hilton Head Christian Academy is a large private school with over 480 students in grades K-12. It is a non-denominational Christian school that is not affiliated with a specific church. In order for any student to attend Hilton Head Christian Academy they must confess to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and sign a statement of faith. Each parent of a student at Hilton Head Christian Academy must interview with the respective Upper, Middle or Lower School Principal and submit a letter from a pastor that they are regularly attending church. In order for any individual to teach at Hilton Head Christian Academy they must agree to the school’s statement of faith in addition to an interview and other academic qualifications. The following questions were asked of each interviewee:

1. What is the most difficult year as a teacher? Why?
2. At any point up to now in your teaching career did you want to quit? At what point was that?

3. What are the positive factors in your job as a teacher that have caused you to remain in your position?

4. What are the negative factors in your job as a teacher that have caused you to want to quit or migrate?

5. What advice would you give a first-year teacher with the intention of making sure they stay in the profession at least five years?

6. Are there any extrinsic factors that you feel make you stay in the position that you are in?

7. Did you have a mentor when you first started teaching? How did this relationship help you to continue teaching?

8. Have you ever wanted to leave teaching or teach at another school because someone else or a number of others were leaving?

9. What ideas do you have in order to help your administration retain teachers?

The following questions were asked in the focus group setting:

1. If the first year is the hardest year for a teacher, what would be the two biggest things that can be done to make sure they make it through the year still excited about what they do?

2. I asked about the positives and negatives of teaching in your individual interviews. If you could pinpoint one thing that would make it or break it for you as far as returning year after year what would it be?

3. Why is the rate of teacher retention higher in private schools when compared to
public schools?

4. When it comes to salary, are there any ways a private school can supplement teachers salaries?

5. What are the key characteristics you would look for if you wanted to hire a teacher that is going to be effective and successful?

6. What suggestions do you have to help those who hire teachers at your school so that these teachers will stay at least five years or more like yourselves?

7. Do you feel that Christian teachers really have two responsibilities? To teach whatever their subject matter is but also to teach their students about Christ?

8. Although unrealistic, what is your idea of the perfect administration when it comes to supporting its teachers?

Rationale for the Method

Qualitative research is commonly used by researchers because it studies a phenomenon in an open-ended way. The researcher does not come in to an open-ended interview with any preconceived biases or prior expectations but lets the study they are conducting develop their hypothesis and conclusions (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The educational issue in which I focused my study was in regard to the ability to retain teachers in today’s American schools, but particularly in a large Christian school.

There has been a good amount of research on why teachers leave or migrate in the teaching profession within the first few years of teaching. I, however, would like to pinpoint what makes a teacher want to stay in the profession. What are the factors or reasons that “pull them back” or keep them where they are when they desire to leave? This goal is going to be met
best through qualitative research by asking the teachers the appropriate questions and really understanding their past experiences and future goals and aspirations.

**Population of Study**

The population of the study consisted of twenty teachers at Hilton Head Christian Academy who have taught one class or more every day for at least five years or more at Hilton Head Christian Academy.

**Sample**

*Sample Criteria.* The following chart indicates the actual years of experience for the teachers at Hilton Head Christian Academy that were interviewed for this study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years of Experience</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14+</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following chart is a breakdown of the level of school (Upper/Middle or Lower) the teachers teach in that participated in the study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of School</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following is a chart of the subject matter that each teacher teaches who participated in this study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Subjects</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rationale for sample.* I chose to interview teachers who have been teaching at least five years at the same school because in order to do so, they have had to overcome most if not all of the challenges and frustrations that make other teachers not just want to leave, but physically leave the school they have been teaching at. This is supported by a number of researchers as well.

Debi Katkus (2007) says that “surviving the first five years seems to be the key to longevity in the teaching profession”. William W Malloy and Tawannah Allen (2007) point out
that “those teachers who have been at the school for more than five years” have made a strong indication that they support the vision for learners of the school. Ingersoll (2002a) mentions that forty-six percent of new teachers around the country will be leavers of the profession before they get to teach at least five years. MacDonald (1995) also says that “those who leave the teaching profession usually do so within the first five years”.

Methods of Sampling. The interviews were all conducted at Hilton Head Christian Academy either in my office or in the classroom of the teacher being interviewed.

Procedure

Instruments. The instruments used for data collection involved cassette tapes and a cassette recorder to record the individual and focus group interviews and a transcriber to transcribe the interviews.

Data Collection Methods. The only type of data collection used for this study was the individual interviews with the 20 teachers at Hilton Head Christian Academy and the focus group interview. The time of the interviews ranged from 12 minutes to 20 minutes per interview with the focus group interview lasting 30 minutes. Each teacher was asked the same list of questions noted earlier. The teachers interviewed for this study represent a sample from all large, private, Christian schools in the United States.

Relevant ethical considerations. The qualitative research posed to harm to the participants involved. Since I also have work at the school for six years, I am familiar with all the participants involved so that produced a level of trust and confidentiality as well. Each teacher that was interviewed for the study was asked to sign an informed consent form before participating in the study (Appendix B). Each gave their permission for the results of their interview to be used in the study.
Chapter 4

Qualitative Analysis

Introduction

This study analyzed teachers’ perceptions of teacher retention and the factors that affect teacher retention on a daily basis. The only way you can get to the heart of the issue when it comes to teacher retention is to talk to the teachers. Teachers are and should be the backbone of any school. If the administration is not doing everything they can to support their teachers in every way possible, whether it is private or public, Christian or secular, small or big, the school will fall apart. I found that a number of teachers have this idea that the administration at a school is really there to carry out their agenda without really listening to the teacher’s questions or concerns. This mindset needs to change if any school is going to succeed. The administration at a school needs to make sure their teachers are receiving as much support, encouragement and assistance as possible to carry out their curriculum and manage their classrooms before they move to the next item on their list of priorities. If this is not taking place teachers will leave a school and the ones that stay will not have their whole heart into what they are doing.

Teachers know that they did not get into a glamorous, popular and well-accepted profession according to those in today’s society. Teachers understand that there are many challenges to teaching and it is not easy to teach a large amount of students with various backgrounds, issues and personalities each and every day. I found that each teacher I interviewed was not naïve to the fact that they decided to teach for a reason and not one of those reasons had to do with prestige, salary or benefits. Teachers teach because they first and foremost enjoy working with children and making a long lasting impact on their lives.
There are definite reasons that teachers leave the profession or move from school to school, but I wanted to find out from these teachers what allows them to keep pressing on despite the various challenges they face. What is it that “fills their tank” year in and year out because there are definitely times during the school year that their “tank” is low or “running on empty” and it needs to be refilled? The factors that play a key role in encouraging teachers to come back to the same school the next school year and also those factors that can be avoided that discourage teachers from coming back are the key to this study.

Description of Data

To understand the perspective that teachers come from and to see what they believe to be the major factors that affect teacher retention, I interviewed 20 teachers from Hilton Head Christian Academy that have taught at least one class every day for at least five years or more at Hilton Head Christian Academy. For comparison of results, each interview was tape recorded and transcribed and coded to recognize reoccurring themes within the data. Through constant comparison of the transcribed data, constant themes emerged. The same questions were asked of each teacher and each interview lasted from 15 to 20 minutes. A focus group was then conducted with a majority of those that were individually interviewed and there was a different set of questions asked to the group than there were in the individual interviews. The questions asked in the focus group were designed to be follow-up questions after reviewing and analyzing the data from the individual interview. The various themes that became evident during the individual interviews were mentioned during the focus group time so that feedback could be received from the individuals in the focus group about these themes.
Interesting Aspects Regarding the Factors that Affect Teacher Retention

There were six different factors that were highlighted and researched in chapter two. We will look at these six factors in regard to the individual interviews that were done for this study.

Pay/Salary. Because Hilton Head Christian Academy is a private school, each teacher that was interviewed came from a private school salary perspective even though some of them worked in public school before they came to Hilton Head Christian Academy. A number of teachers were straightforward in expressing their frustration when it comes to the pay that teachers receive, however, the amount of teachers that mentioned salary as a negative was surprisingly low when conducting the interviews. Nevertheless, each teacher agreed that they knew what they were getting into as far as salary goes if they decided to teach. They were not going to make a lot of money and get paid in comparison to the amount of effort they were going be putting into their job. They understood that there is some sacrifice that needs to be made financially when you become a teacher. Most teachers, however, brought it up as a factor when looking at the negatives of their position or ways administration can help to retain teachers.

Even though the sample used to conduct this study cannot be used in each and every situation, it is interesting to also look at the breakdown of men and women that were interviewed. The following is a chart of how many men were interviewed compared to how many women:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number Interviewed at HHCA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is no secret that the majority (maybe even two thirds according to the sample of teachers in this study) of teachers today are women. All five of the teachers that are male in this study are high school teachers. This may impact salaries more than we think since most women are not the breadwinners in their family and therefore are not really pressuring schools for higher salaries.

There is a different mindset when it comes to salaries for men and women in public or private schools. This was made evident by Michael when he said, “I think the big thing is salaries, especially for those male teachers that are head of households. It is just so hard to live off of a teacher salary today and it makes it even harder for guys who are breadwinners in their family.” When giving his ideas on how an administration can retain teachers, Daniel stated: “For women, they need a lot of positive feedback. They need encouragement and for administrators to tell them when they do something well. For guys it is just moving the decimal point over on their salary.” For men and single women, when their income is really linked to their standard of living, salary can be the biggest factor of all when it comes to retaining these teachers. Gabrielle states: “I think our society has to figure out how to pay their teachers better or they are going to go to the private sector”.

I don’t think any teachers interviewed were expecting anything drastic to be done by the school when it comes to salaries. All teachers would like to see is a continual effort by the school to make sure they are compensated appropriately. Teachers understand the school has a number of other responsibilities that must be taken care of as well. Emily says that “when a school can, I think they need to pay their teachers to the best of their ability a good salary to take some of the financial burden off of them.” A few ways schools can be showing a continual effort is to update the teachers on where the money is going on a yearly basis, ideas for improvements and then an effort to offer ways to supplement a teacher’s salary such as stipends
or better benefits. Chris expresses this by saying that “it is important for a school to be always looking for ways to bring a better quality of life to their teachers.” Andrew also comments on this when he says, “You have to take care of your people. You always have to look for ways to improve, whether that be through raises, benefits or just introducing a dental or eye care plan, because if people don’t feel appreciated by the way they are compensated and if they feel they can’t take care of their family, then they are going to have to look for another job.”

A great point that was made during the focus group interview is that a lot of people, including parents of the students they teach, are not even aware of how much teachers make. In the public schools the pay scale is made public and any one can go and look at it. In private schools this is not the case and it leaves things up to speculation or just not even caring to know. In the focus group interview, one teacher said, “I don’t think parents or people in the community know how much we make. I don’t think they have a clue. I think if they knew they would be appalled. I had a friend who tried to guess my salary because she knew it was pretty low and she guessed double.” Another teacher stated: “You can’t be head of household and work at a school like this, and not have your spouse work. I think we need some sort of fund or endowment. You can’t ask the parents to do it because it would double their tuition.”

Administrative Support. This was a major factor for teachers when considering why teachers leave or stay at a school. Teachers want to know that what they are doing has meaning and that their efforts are supported. Bill states: “When you are not supported or recognized by the administration you begin to ask yourself if what you are doing is worth it.” It is important for an administration to build relationships and know their teachers on a personal level. Jennifer comments on this aspect when she says that, “I think administration needs to be tuned into where each teacher is all the time both personally and professionally. I think you need an administrator
who is not going to just think of you as someone who clocks in and out and then goes home.”

John also states: “Just a continual reminder that you are supported can go a long way.”

How can teachers know they are being supported? An area where the administration can really give their support is with parents and discipline of students, especially in the private schools. Hannah says that “you need administrative support when it comes to a difficult parent. Those are times that teaching can get the most frustrating.” Alyssa recognizes the over involvement at times with parents when she says: “It can just wear on you when you are dealing with parents, especially if they want to dictate to you how to teach or how to manage your classroom when they have never been in a classroom environment.” Abigail also says that “as a teacher there are years when you just have a parent or sometimes several parents, that no matter how hard you try or no matter how hard you work, they do not see that their child is at fault and they are looking for someone to blame. We as teachers often are the ones that they point the finger at.” It is vital that an administration is taking some of this burden that may be put on by over involved or unthoughtful parents. This pressure or burden can really make any teacher, whether they have been at the school two or twenty years, want to leave. Heather states: “If I had an issue with a student, family, or parent, I want to be supported as much as possible by the administration. They need to realize that we have twenty three students in a class…that’s a lot of kids.”

Another area that administrators can give their support to is by having open communication and just listening to their teachers. Bill says that “better communication and recognition” goes a long way in order for an administration to show their support. Administrators should never create an atmosphere of fear for a teacher to come and talk to them. There should not even be any hesitancy on the teacher’s part if they want to vent about
something or give a suggestion. Sarah states: “It would be great to have that open communication with your administrator. One that listens, but you also know that they are not going to do anything damaging with what you say. I think that would help the teachers stay, but sometimes that communication is not flowing both ways.” Jennifer says also that, “I can walk into my administrator’s office and tell them something I don’t agree with and they will listen to me. They may disagree with what I say, but that is okay and we will just agree to disagree. I got it out and they know where I stand and away we go.” Hannah states: “I think it is important for administrators to be grateful for what the teachers do. They need to take note of what we do and make sure they know what we are doing.”

A final way an administration can give their support is by doing their best to build relationships among the faculty members. During the time a teacher is at a school, they are going to build relationships with their students, the families of their students and relationships within the community. They will also build relationships with their colleagues, but an administration can really help in this regard. Surprisingly, this was a subject that was mentioned by quite a few teachers being interviewed. Melissa gives her take on this subject when she says, “we used to have Christmas parties and potlucks at people’s houses and now we don’t do any of that anymore.” Tina said that “it means a lot to teachers to just get together unexpectedly and have coffee once in a while or surprise us with a little encouragement.” Michelle mentions that “the staff and faculty should be able to bond more and it seems like nowadays we don’t do that anymore”. Ideas that have come up with the teachers have been a retreat just for teachers, doing something in people’s homes or getting together for certain events. Bill would like to have “more fellowship outside of school. It would be nice to get to know the families of the people we work with.”
Encouragement can definitely go a long way when it comes to teachers, and administrators need to make a concerted effort to encourage their teachers. Tina made a great point when she said, “Encouragement from the administration is huge, but it is nothing different than what we would do for our students.” Melissa expresses that she “feels that the teachers here are not really honored. I think we are only honored in an open meeting. I think there is a lot of distance there when it comes to encouragement. I don’t think we can be encouraged enough.” Daniel mentions that “women especially need a lot of feedback. They need encouragement.” This is true for guys as well, but it may be even more important for women just because of the way they are designed. Of course an administration can spend money and recognize their teachers publicly, but do they encourage their teachers in a one-on-one and impersonal setting as well? Encouragement doesn’t need to take any money at all. At times, just a quick note or few encouraging words are all a teacher needs to make it through a tough day.

In the focus group interview that was conducted for this study, the teachers were asked what their idea of the “perfect” administration would be. Although this is unrealistic because every administration is going to have their flaws, it should be what the administration at a school should strive for. The characteristics that were mentioned to describe a “perfect” administration were “fair,” “consistent,” “available,” “and able to see the big picture as well as the details,” “have a vision, and be able to follow through with it”, and “not giving a lot of busywork.” One thing that is done at Hilton Head Christian Academy that is well appreciated by the teachers is that administrators also teach a class. This helps them “not to lose touch with what is going on in the classroom during the day.” In a number of schools it may be up twenty years since administrators at the school have taught in the classroom. If this is the case it can cause the
administrators to “lose touch with the generation of kids, what teachers face on a daily basis and other things that are important to kids.”

*Mentoring.* The first year of a teacher’s career or at a new school was what over 90% of the teachers interviewed said the most difficult year was for a teacher. There are many reasons why it is the most difficult. For those new to teaching, Alyssa states: “You learn everything you can in college and it is programmed into your mind that you are the best teacher and then all of a sudden you are in a school system and you have to learn a new curriculum and how to communicate with parents, the structure of the school and the policies of the school.” Emma also adds that, “you have nothing to draw on except your student teaching and I think most people come in fairly idealistic and their dreams are a little bit shattered. For most people they underestimate the amount of planning that is required for a course.”

For teachers that have some experience, but are starting over at a new school, Sarah says that, “You are faced with so many different changes having to do your curriculum and trying to figure out all the rules of the school.” Heather says it is because of the “newness of the school and the basic policies because they change from school to school. The way things are done from as basic to lunchroom duty to regular duties you have to computer systems, how grades are put in to how discipline is handled.” It all can get overwhelming pretty quickly whether it is your first year teaching or just your first year at a new school.

For those first-year teachers who are going through the most difficult year as a teacher, what advice does a seasoned teacher have to help you get through the year? Daniel says, “To try and think ahead. Set long-term goals.” Hannah thinks it is important to, “Not get overinvested in your first year so that you cannot do a very good job with your teaching. You need to protect your family time, protect your weekends and time with your spouse so you feel like you are
making the proper investment.” It’s important to make sure you are taking things one step at
time and not overwhelming yourself with responsibilities because the classroom is where you
need to be making the biggest impact. Gabrielle says, “I think finding someone in the
administration that can build you up and you can talk to when you are down.”

When it comes to the first year of teaching, it is going to come down to just having an
understanding that it is going to be tough because it is so new and the biggest thing a teacher is
going to need is perseverance. Jennifer says to “just keep smiling and hang in there because this
too shall pass.” Chris says it is important “not to take yourself too seriously”. Bill adds to this
by saying, “Don’t take things as seriously as they seem.” Melissa states: “Pace yourselves and
just bite the bullet because it is going to be a tough year.” Sarah encourages new teachers to “not
worry about what they can’t control.” John sums it up best when he says:

“Be patient and don’t take anything personally. You are going to come in with a lot of
high ideals, and although you should not lose those, you need to realize that it is
important to learn from your mistakes and it is going to take time. Don’t take it
personally when a parent is upset over this or you are taking criticism for that. It is all
part of the learning process. If you take things personally then you will get upset and it
just is not worth it.”

A key to getting through this difficult but crucial time as a teacher is through a mentor. A
mentor is someone a new teacher can bounce ideas off, share lesson plans with, listen through a
trying time and just get a teacher familiar with the in’s and out’s of the school. Chris states:

“Everyone should have a go to person. I think the best person for a teacher to go to for many
things is just another teacher who has been there before.” Every teacher interviewed agreed that
there should be some sort of mentoring program established at a school even though over 50% of
them did not have a mentor themselves when they started their teaching careers. Melissa thinks that “mentoring is important because you have someone to talk to and find out easier ways to get things done.” Tina says mentoring is important because you are, “teaching the young people ways not to burnout”. Olivia even gives her personal experience with a mentor when she says that, “if it weren’t for my mentor, I wouldn’t have stayed, but they have held me up through the rough times and given me good advice.”

If it is best for a teacher to have someone to help guide them along their first year or two, how involved should they be? Olivia says that, “there are people who would want to work with a mentor and there are going to be people who would not and just need someone they can go to and ask questions.” Bill had a mentor when he first started teaching, but did not feel it was as productive as it could have been. He states, “We had to spend a certain number of hours together. She would be in my classroom and I would go to hers and I felt some of that was a waste”. John suggests that, “It should be more relationship based. Some weeks it could take two hours if there are some big issues to discuss, but other weeks it may take a few minutes because things are going well. I just think there should be somebody that does that faithfully more.”

Emily says a mentor program is good to have for first-year teachers “only if it is a good match between the mentor and the new teacher. If it is not then no, because they are not going to listen to someone they don’t respect and click with.”

How can we describe a successful mentor? Hannah mentions that her mentor “gave her opportunities to grow, so it wasn’t just a ‘you’re right’ or ‘you’re wrong’, but she gave suggestions or ideas that did not have to be implemented immediately.” Alyssa says a mentor is there to “calm the nerves and ease tension.”
School Culture/Organizational Fit. Every school has their own way of doing things. No school is going to be exactly the same. There are big differences such as the daily bell schedule and the length of courses, how grading is done, and the type of students you may have all the way down to what little duties you may have, what a school may provide for your classroom and how many sick days you get. If a teacher is going to be successful at a particular school, they are going to have to understand and agree with the philosophy of the school and buy into what that school does on a daily basis.

A couple teachers that were interviewed were involved as parents with the school before they taught at Hilton Head Christian Academy. It was already a school that they were comfortable sending their children so when the school inquired about them teaching at the school, they had no problem buying into the philosophy of the school and for the most part knew how things were run. Michael states: “When you are a parent at a school you become invested in the school.” This is especially important for Christian schools because they are first and foremost going to emphasize the spiritual aspect of a student’s life. Teachers are going to teach in a Christian school for the same reasons they want to send their kids to a Christian school which is a big reason over 60% of the teacher’s interviewed for this study have a child attending the school they are teaching at.

Not one of these teachers mentioned that the reason they teach at the school is because their children attend the school. Twenty percent of the teachers interviewed have had children attend the school they teach at, but have graduated and no longer attend. Why did these teachers stay at the school despite a big extrinsic factor playing a big part in having them teach at that school? Hannah says that “the administration at the school has continued to be interested in my professional growth. It has kept me at this particular school instead of looking elsewhere to find
that opportunity.” Melissa points out that, “I was very involved when my kids were here, but when they left this school was still a huge part of my heart.” Michelle states: “The children kept me here and knowing that God wants me to work with children. I just enjoy being here and being a part of the community.”

Relationships are crucial at any school and if a school is conducive to building relationships they are going to be successful in keeping their teachers. Mary says that “it took some time to get settled in here, but once your reputation is built and you have the relationships within the community, I don’t really want to teach anywhere else.” When asked what kept pulling him back when he had opportunities and offers to teach and coach at another school, Andrew said it was the “relationships between colleagues and the relationships we have with the kids and families here.” Bill says it is the “quality of the kids, families and the community.” John points out that “there is a good atmosphere amongst the teachers at the school and amongst the administration.”

When a teacher gets connected to a school they are going to have a more difficult time leaving that school even if they have to leave for reasons that have nothing to do with the school itself. Gabrielle says, “Being able to be with them (the students) and form relationships with them is a key to why I stay”. Daniel states: “It is good to be part of a community as a part of education as well. I think there are more personal connections here.” Emma mentions an observation made by her son who is a student at Hilton Head Christian Academy.

“My son has come to me a couple times when a few teachers have not worked out and has said, ‘That teacher just doesn’t fit into our school.’ I asked him what he meant and he said, ‘well, you know, all of our teachers do something a certain way and we kind of have a rhythm at our school and that person didn’t really fit into that approach.’”
This is an interesting observation from a high school student, but a very keen observation as well. Schools will develop their own culture and establish their own criteria of how a teacher will be successful at their particular school. For some schools you may have to be more relational, for some you may have to be more strict, and for others you may have to be really flexible. Whatever that culture is, a teacher will not be successful until they have grasped it and conformed themselves to it to a certain degree. When the teachers who participated in the focus group interview were asked if they can pinpoint one thing that would make it or break it as far as returning, almost every response had to do with relationships. One teacher said, “I think it’s relationships with your students and being able to see them grow,” another teacher says, “I think it is relationally between teachers. Relationships with everyone around you is a hindrance if you are not reaching out and trying to build relationships and encouragement as well.” Finally, another teacher states: “I think administratively that relationship is so much more important to me in knowing I can walk in to any of their offices and they are willing to help me.”

What are the signs a school needs to be aware of in order to know if a teacher is not fitting in? A few that came up as a result of the focus group interview were “a negative attitude and no sense of humor,” “inflexibility,” “not being able to adapt to different kids of people (parents, students, peers),” and being impersonal.

*Teacher Hiring.* If a school is going to make sure they have teachers who fit into their culture and organizational climate, it is all going to start with the teacher hiring process. Administrators at any school, public or private, need to make sure they are bringing in teachers that will be successful at their particular school. How does an administration know if a teacher is going to be successful? First of all, how do they enjoy being around kids? Michael made a great point when he said, “the only way to survive (as a teacher) is if you enjoy your students.
alike. When you add the Christian component into that equation it can really be another big pull to keep teachers at a Christian school, but only if that school is consistent with their philosophies and holds firm to Biblical principals they were founded upon.

When asked whether being a Christian plays a role in them deciding to continue teaching at a Christian school, every teacher interviewed said it does. Over 33% of the teachers that were interviewed have taught in a public school before teaching at Hilton Head Christian Academy. Daniel states: “Put everything else aside, you want a relationship with the Lord. So the more you can emphasize that in teaching it is so important and even more than your subject matter.” Hannah says, “I need to be where I can share my faith and where I can give the kids the bottom line of what it really important…I personally feel called to a Christian school and if this was not a Christian school I would go elsewhere.” Alyssa also states: “I have been in the public school system, I have taught in a private school, and I have taught now in a Christian school and there definitely is a difference. It’s a big difference. With my values and beliefs it is a big reason why I am here.”

A number of teachers point out the difficulty they would have teaching in a school that they were not able to freely talk about their beliefs. Melissa mentions, “I think it would be very hard to teach in a public school because I wouldn’t have the opportunity to talk about the passion in my heart freely.” Sarah emphasizes that “teaching my students to fall in love with God is the most important thing and could I do that in the public schools? Probably, but not to the effect I could have here.” Abigail states: “I have taught in public school, but it was years ago when we could still pray. During my last few years I taught in public school I was called in for religious bulletin boards around holiday time. I don’t think I can go back to public school.” Finally, Emily says, “When I did my student teaching I felt dry because you know you have the answer
but you can’t get into it. Here I can tell them God loves them and how important a relationship with Him is and not worry about getting into trouble.”

A great observation was made by a teacher that those who teach in a Christian school have “twice the responsibility” because they are not only teaching their students the subject matter that goes along with the course they are taking, but each teacher is also responsible to model and teach each of their students how to live the Christian life as well. This two-sided responsibility as a Christian school teacher was discussed as well in the focus group interview. Each teacher participating felt strongly that although “it is a big responsibility, it is also a big privilege.” One teacher made the comment, “It is a big reason that I want to teach here instead of the public school or a school that isn’t Christian.” Another teacher states: “The only reason you would go back to public school is the better benefits, salary, etc. The reason we come back to teach at a private, Christian school is for the same reasons that we want our kids in a school like this...environment, influence, camaraderie, oneness, safety, and all those things. So it would be very difficult to go back.”

**Summary.** In sum, this study offered insight into the teacher perceptions when it comes to the major factors that affect teacher retention in today’s schools and what can be done by administration and experienced teachers alike to increase teacher retention. There were twenty-one teachers from a large non-denominational Christian school on Hilton Head Island, SC that served as the sample for this study. Every teacher that participated did so without any limitations and each was honest and complete in their response to the questions that were asked of them. Each teacher was willing to offer areas of improvement that could be made to increase teacher retention and there was no reluctance from them when it came to giving reasons why a school may have a hard time retaining their teachers as well. The compiled data will hopefully serve as
a benefit to any teacher or administrator at a school that desires to increase the teacher retention at their school.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

After analyzing the results of this qualitative research, it is clear that there are a number of things a school can do to help retain their teachers year after year. There are many benefits a school could enjoy just by holding on to their best teachers year after year such as consistency in the classroom, better camaraderie between students and teachers, and consistency and improvement in instruction which would result in improved test scores. There are very few if any limitations in this study and they can be overcome by awareness and giving attention to detail. The reported results lead to practical applications and can also be compared to previous studies done on teacher retention.

Interpretation of the Results

*It’s about the children.* In the present study, teachers often referred to their main motivation for teaching to begin with as being that they enjoy working with children. You have to if you are going to teach in an elementary, middle, or high school. If you don’t have the desire to work with children or if children annoy you, then teaching is definitely not the profession for you to go into. When one teaches, kids are what keep them going. You want to not only have an impact in each of your student’s lives, but to enjoy working with them and experiencing the small victories of teaching children like helping them through a rough time with a friend or seeing them finally “get it” when they get in trouble for the tenth time for the same thing.

When you teach children it can be the most frustrating experience but it also can be the most rewarding because you are making a lasting impact on your students’ lives whether you see it right away or not. One thing that a teacher gets to experience that many others do not who work in other occupations is that when you work with children, no day is the same. You are
hopefully going to be teaching on different material every day and your students are always
going to be in different moods, going through different situations and saying different things
every day as well. As a teacher it is important to feed off of the energy of your students and be
able to laugh along with them at times.

Almost every teacher mentioned working with the children as a positive factor that has
caused them to remain in the position they have been in. Once the administration of a school
recognizes this simple fact and doesn’t hinder a teacher’s ability to build relationships with their
students, but encourages their teachers through various means to cultivate lasting relationships
with their students, they will be hitting on the main factor that keeps teachers wanting to teach.

*Relationships are critical for teachers.* Not only are relationships with the students
important for teachers, but also the relationships that teachers have with their colleagues and
administrators. The majority of the information from the individual interviews and most of the
information from the focus group interview came back to relationships. It is important for
teachers to be able to confide in other teachers and relate with them. If a school invests in ways
for the teachers at their school to have the opportunity to get to know each other and also their
families, it makes for a more conducive and encouraging environment to be in. This is seen
more in private schools than public because a public school does not do much in terms of
relationship building within the faculty and staff. More teachers on a public school can clock in
and clock out without really seeing anybody besides their students.

In a private school one has to wear a lot more hats because they rely on fewer personnel
to cover a larger variety of responsibilities within the school. Private school teachers are then
more encouraged more to get involved and sometimes a private school will not hire a teacher
unless they agree to take on one or more responsibilities besides teaching their required number
of classes. Nevertheless, a lot of it is going to depend on the administration. Whether public or private, if the administration puts an emphasis on relationship building amongst the faculty and staff of a school, there are many ways it can be done. As a result, if teachers see that the administration is making it a priority to build the relationships amongst their teachers and their families, they will be more inclined to stay at that school.

*Teachers need support and encouragement.* Let's face it, teaching is a tough job. It can be draining and just downright exhausting day after day of having to put up with demanding students while trying to get through curriculum that some of the students in your class are not even getting. At some point, if not every year, every teacher is going to have to deal with personality conflicts with children, unmotivated children and also a parent or two who just will just not let things go. Although these things tend to get better each year you teach and gain valuable experience, there is really no ultimate way to avoid them.

Almost every teacher mentioned support from the administration when they were asked what ideas they had to retain teachers like themselves. Most of these that mentioned support as a way the administration can help retain teachers, had not necessarily had a bad experience with the administration. They just want to know that when things do get stressful, they will have an administrator right there to listen to them, be able to take some of the burden off of them if possible, and just allow them the freedom to address the situation in whatever way they as the teacher feel most comfortable. Most teachers understand that they are responsible to get through any tough situations they find themselves in whether it was their fault or not. Nevertheless, if the administration is not there to support, assist and encourage them during these difficult times, this will be one of the main reason teachers will decide to leave the classroom or move to another school.
It starts with the hiring. There are times a teacher decides to leave a school and not even they can be at fault for leaving because they should have never been there in the first place. If the administration is not going to hire teachers at their school that are conducive to the school climate and environment, they are the first ones to blame for those teachers wanting to leave. There are times when administrators decide to fill a teacher opening too quickly because of deadlines, pressure from their superior or personal preference when that person is not capable to succeed at that school. They do not place that individual in a position to succeed from the beginning.

A number of key characteristics were mentioned at the end of chapter two and also in chapter four that administrators need to look for in a potential teacher. Two that come up most often in interviews are a sense of humor and a positive attitude. A number of the other qualities can be learned, but these two should be evident from the beginning of the hiring process. Different schools will emphasize different characteristics. In a private school or Christian school, teachers are going to be expected to interact and get involved more with colleagues and also the students. In a public school, teachers can clock in and clock out more or less without having to worry about anyone pressuring them to get involved.

Although knowledge of subject matter should be high on the list for both, a public school administrator may place more emphasis on it when hiring teachers because a private school administrator is also looking for that potential teacher to teach an elective, coordinate a club and coach a sport. Whatever the expectations are, however, the school needs to be upfront at the outset of the hiring process so a teacher knows what is expected of them. The school cannot expect a teacher to be told one thing when they are hired and then be told they need to do
something else right before they begin to teach or right after they have already started teaching in their classroom.

_Potential Applications of Findings_

_Every private school needs to consider ways to supplement a teacher’s income._ Not being able to pay their teachers what they deserve is always going to be an issue for most private schools today. Unless a school is going to raise their tuition to exorbitant amounts, private school teachers are never going to make the amount that their public school counterparts eventually make throughout the course of their career. There are ways, however, that these schools can supplement a teacher’s income.

The first way would be through benefits. Private schools also are not able to provide the benefits that public schools do since they are not government run organizations. Most cannot offer dental or eye care benefits. Because of this the benefits for private school teachers tend to be too expensive or provide not enough coverage. A good amount of private school teachers cannot afford to put their family on the school’s benefits because it will take away a good chunk of their paycheck. Instead, these teachers are scrambling to cover their family members with independent policies and health care sharing organizations. This can be really costly in the end because of different things that cannot be covered or just having to pay a number of different premiums every month.

Ways that private schools can help their teachers is through a flex plan. This is a way for teachers to be able to name an amount they think they will spend during the year on health care need and get it taken out of their check each pay period so they don’t even see it. They would then have that amount to spend for the year and they will get reimbursed for any funds that
qualify under the flex plan guidelines. These plans work great for schools who cannot offer dental care or eye care.

Another big way a school can supplement a teacher's salary is through an endowment fund. This would take some fundraising efforts, but once it gets established, it could be one of the most beneficial ways to supplement a teacher's salary. As I mentioned earlier, it is not practical to just raise the tuition to pay teachers more. A private school needs to make sure they keep their tuition rates at a level that is going to be competitive and reflect the mission and purpose of the school. A simple fundraising effort every other year, however, can really help to supplement a teacher's salary enough so they don't feel the pinch every year and get the desire to go and teach at another school they feel does pay what they feel is more appropriate.

A final way to supplement a teacher's salary is through professional development and stipends. A teacher is always going to be looking for ways to supplement their income and if they can't get it within the school, they will find ways outside of school to do it. While the teacher may still decide to teach at the school, if they are doing things outside the school to supplement their income, they will not be able to invest any more time at the school other than what they do in the classroom. If, for example, a school provides financial assistance to obtain a masters degree and then provides a stipend each year for teachers that have obtained that master's degree, most teachers are going to at least consider obtaining a graduate level degree. In doing this, the school is investing in their teachers and that is crucial for every teacher to understand at whatever school they may be at.

Another example would be in the form of stipends for duties above and beyond the teacher's everyday responsibilities. A number of the stipends that fall into this category relate to coaching athletics, but there a number of other responsibilities that can be rewarded with
stipends. Some of these include department heads, drama, coordinating certain events, leading a
cub, being head of household, etc. The most important aspect that needs to be remembered
though, is that teachers need to feel like the school is investing in them as well. If this is taking
place in a healthy manner, teachers are going to want to stay and invest themselves more into the
school because they know that the school is doing all it can to invest in their teachers.

*Leave time for relationship building.* So many times a school can get wrapped up into
being the best they can be that they forget that one of the major needs of a teacher is the
relationships they have with their colleagues. No matter how well a teacher is doing in the
classroom, kids are eventually going to wear you out. Teachers were students once in their lives
and most do not feel like going back and living that time in their lives over again. Although to
be a successful teacher you need to relate to kids well and be able to get the energy you need to
teach from them, at the end of the day it is always going to be the relationships the teachers have
with their colleagues that keeps them in the profession.

If any school is going to make it a priority to build relationships amongst the teachers,
they are going to have to consistently set aside time in order for this to happen. They just cannot
expect teachers to get to know each other when they are so busy throughout the day. Popular
times to do to some relationship building are during in-service days, before school or after school
get-togethers or evening events at a specific place or in people’s homes. If a school has the
necessary resources they can even begin to think about a retreat just for the teachers. An
important aspect of doing this relationship building is getting to know the families of the people
you work with. You can know much more about a person and what makes them successful by
spending some quality time in getting to know them and knowing who the important people in
their life are.
Make sure you are consistent. Teachers live in a black and white world. They are telling their students all the time, “this needs to be done this way by this time if you want full credit,” or “if you come into my class a second late you need to go down to the office and get a tardy slip,” or “this is what you need to do for an A on this test or project.” When you work with kids you can’t afford to have any gray area in your policies and procedures because they will take advantage of every little loophole, hence the popular phrase, “give them an inch and they will take a mile.” Teachers are the same way when it comes to the administration.

Teachers expect the administration at their school to be consistent in the policies and procedures of the school. If there are inconsistencies in the way students are being disciplined or the way grading procedures are being done, the teachers are the first ones to hear about it because their students will be the first ones to bring it up. If there is a dress code at the school, everyone needs to do their best to uphold that dress code according to the policies in the handbook. If a teacher, however, is referring a student and they do not see the administrator being consistent with their discipline, it really puts the teacher in a precarious and most of the time a no-win situation.

Another area a school administration needs to be consistent in is the work it has their teachers do. If the administration at a school wants their teachers to complete certain tasks, whether they are associated with curriculum, standardized testing or just something that is supposed to benefit the school, the teacher wants to make sure their efforts are not being done in vain. The school should follow up any work they make the teachers do with results and then reveal the application of the specific task that was done. An administration does not want its teachers thinking that their time could have benefited more doing something else because what
they just did for the school was never implemented or at least was planned to be implemented in
the future.

*Be more involved in the hiring process.* It is vitally important for administrators to hire
the right teachers who will fit into the climate and atmosphere at their school, but they do not
have to do it alone. The administration at a school should have priority in the decision making
process of who teaches at their school, but there should be more then one or two administrators
involved in hiring a teacher. It would be smart to even get experienced teachers at the school
involved in the hiring process. If you have a committee of just teachers it would seem that some
different questions would be asked and they would be looking for a few different qualities or
characteristics than if that teacher were just interviewed by one or two administrators.
Administrators are going to look at credentials, experience and knowledge of subject area first
and foremost. Teachers on the other hand are going to be looking for the intangibles a teacher
needs to relate to the kids they teach, be successful managing a classroom, and focus more on the
relational side of things.

Another good way to get teachers involved is to have the potential teacher meet with the
teachers in the department they will be teaching with. This could be a formal interview setting
but it also could just be over lunch. It is always good to give the teachers who that potential
teacher will be working with a chance to meet, observe and evaluate that teacher since they will
be the ones mentoring them and working with them day in and day out.

Finally, every school should make an effort to go out and find the teachers it wants. No
school should ever just sit and wait for good teachers to fall into their lap. If you wait for
teachers to just send their resume to you it limits the opportunities you have as a school to get the
teachers that are excited about what they do and desire to improve and make a difference
wherever they are at. It is important for a school to attend job fairs, visit colleges and universities and spend some money to place the openings for teaching positions at their school in a few well read and popular places. They may still find out that some good teachers came to them in the end, but they will also reap the rewards of solid, energetic and just great teachers if they put themselves out there and make their best effort to find teachers as well.

*Have a mentoring program in place.* Obviously through the review of literature and the data provided through the interviews in this study, the first year is always going to be the toughest. As a school it is important to have a mentoring program in place to assist the new teachers on how to get acclimated to the school and to serve as a buffer for when things are stressful and difficult during the year. If this is not in place and teachers are left to fend for themselves, they are not going last long and maybe leave after that first year because it is a very difficult, long and stressful year for any teacher who is going through it.

It doesn’t have to be a program that requires a lot of hours, but it should be one where the administration gets involved in the beginning matching up the new teachers with the appropriate experienced teacher and then be involved in the end of the program. There should also be follow up to see if the appropriate time is being spent with the new teacher and the adjustment is being made smoothly to the school. Careful consideration needs to be given by the administration in matching an experienced teacher with a new teacher that they will be able work well with. If they match experienced teachers up with new teachers and it doesn’t go well because of different teaching styles, personality differences or just significantly different characteristics, it could be devastating for the retention of that teacher.

The administration also needs to listen to the experienced teacher if they have certain suggestions to support, encourage or provide assistance to the new teacher. The mentor in a
Teachers need to be looking to God for direction and guidance. They should be obeying Him and working to please God and Him alone so that they know when He is calling them to a different school or a different career. Many times this decision comes prematurely due to improper motives and intentions. Once teachers begin to think that they need to impress others, all of a sudden the administration at a school becomes who they are working for. When this begins to happen, a teacher is automatically going to be frustrated.

There will also be teachers who will get selfish, however, and think that they deserve better or they need more than what God is already doing to provide for their needs. It says in Philippians 2:3, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” Also in James 3:16 it says, “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” These teachers will move from school to school every one or two years because they find the negatives in a school first instead of allowing themselves to get comfortable with the decision they made to teach at that school. They do not allow God to work in their lives and use them where they are; they feel that the grass is always greener on the other side when in reality it just doesn’t work that way.

At a Christian school specifically, when all the teachers are believers and have a desire to serve Him as well as teach children it can be a very conducive environment for spiritual growth and encouragement. There is no greater reward than investing one’s life into the lives of children and hopefully seeing them mature and grow both in knowledge in the classroom, but knowledge of the Lord as well. In Ephesians 6:7, 8 it says, “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.” A Christian school teacher needs to
understand this and if it is carried out, they can overcome many of the disappointments and frustrations that come with teaching the youth of today’s generation.

**Relation of the Results to Literature**

Analyzing the results in light of the current literature illumined the teacher’s perceptions of increasing teacher retention in today’s schools. Previous research studies support the present finding that teacher retention is primarily affected by teacher pay, mentoring, administrative support, school climate and environment and hiring procedures. There may be other factors involved depending on the school, but if these five factors are improved upon and emphasized within a school it will see an improvement in the retention of their teachers.

What a teacher gets paid in return for their work in the classroom it has a direct effect on retention (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006). Richard Mihans (2008) predicts that more highly qualified teachers will either come back to the teaching profession and those that are currently in the field will remain in the teaching profession once salaries can get in line with those of other career options. In light of the current situation when it comes to salaries in the teaching profession it would seem that this prediction is still a ways off from becoming a reality, but private schools especially need to do what they can in order to convince their teachers that teaching can be a viable career (Levin, 2008).

Darling-Hammond (2003) mentions that teachers who are given the opportunity to be involved in consistent mentoring by experienced colleagues at a school, are less inclined to leave the teaching profession in the early years. On the opposite end of the spectrum it is also important for experienced teachers to get involved in mentoring. Research has shown that the more leadership responsibilities are given to experienced teachers, the higher retention there is of those teachers as well (Mihans, 2008). Breaux and Wong have studied mentoring and induction
programs for seven years and recommend the following components be in place for any induction program to be successful:

1) Start with an initial four or five days of induction before school begins
2) Offer a continuum of professional development through systematic training over a period of two or three years.
3) Provide study groups where new teachers can network and build support, commitment, and leadership in a learning community.
4) Incorporate a strong sense of administrative support.
5) Integrate a mentoring component into the induction process.
6) Present a structure for modeling effective teaching during in-services and mentoring.

Some ideas for mentoring programs that directly address workload issues of first-year teachers are provided by Lisa Renard (2003):

1) Do not pair new classroom teachers in inclusion terms.
2) Do not require new teachers to advise or coach until they have two or three years of classroom experience.
3) Do not assign new teachers to a school duty period; instead hold them accountable for using that time for planning.
4) Avoid assigning new teachers to the most challenging grade levels or students.
5) Refrain from assigning new teachers to classrooms with multiple grade levels.
6) Refrain from assigning new teachers to more than two course preparations.
7) Avoid giving new teachers schedules that require them to change classrooms repeatedly during the day or to work primarily from a cart.
8) Decrease the number of professional development activities expected of new teachers.

9) Make certain that new teachers and their mentors have the same planning period. Occasionally provide substitutes so their mentor can observe in their classes.

The principal is a very key figure when it comes to retention. They need to be supporting their teachers and giving them quality time so that the teachers know what is expected of them, what they are doing well, and more important, what they are not doing well. In a study done by Rebecca Anhorn (2008), it was concluded that the principal needed to be providing their teachers with valuable feedback about classroom instruction, management and organization. The teachers that participated in her study were disappointed at the lack of involvement and concern by their principal. A number of teachers participating in Anhorn’s (2008) study noted the lack of support from administration and a few specifically pointed out a poor relationship with their principal as reasons they either left the profession or migrated to another school.

Those teachers that do choose to remain in the profession after three years overwhelmingly indicated that getting feedback from administrators on a regular basis was a major reason for their decision to stick with it (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). It is important for administrators to make time for teachers to also work together (Mihans, 2008). Teachers are too busy during the day to come up with time on their own to communicate with each other. Any time a teacher has some free time during the day it is normally spent planning for classes later on or just relaxing and unwinding a bit. Administrators can help retain teachers by creating school structures that promote integrated professional cultures with time during the day for frequent exchanges of information and ideas across experience levels (Ibid & Sargent, 2003). There
needs to be a system of checks and balances in place that encourages teachers to continue to grow in their profession showing evidences of improvement each step of the way (Levin, 2008).

**Strengths of Study**

This project involved qualitative research which resulted in findings that can be applied to other types of schools besides the Christian private school. The research that was done through individual interviews provided very detailed, honest and important information. This information can be used to implement in various programs and procedures at any school. Due to the homogeneity of the sample that was interviewed, the results that were contrived from the individual interviews and the focus group interview can be used by large Christian schools almost directly.

Unlike previous studies done on teacher retention that focus on the aspects of why a teacher leaves to teach at another school or leave the profession altogether, I wanted this study to provide information about what makes teachers want to stay. I wanted to give schools an idea of what pulls a teacher back to want to keep teaching in the position they are in despite the frustrations, hardships and struggles that come with being a teacher. The results of this specific study are most applicable to private schools since all of the teachers interviewed were from a private school.

The method of data collection involved interviews with twenty teachers and a focus group interview with half of those teachers. When the individual interviews were completed and transcribed, it provided a rich data set that was then organized even further into similar and comparable responses to come up with a majority response to each question. The results of the individual interviews were then used to come up with the questions for the focus group interview. These questions were constructed based on trends, inconsistencies and tendencies.
from the individual interviews. The data from the focus group interview was then transcribed as well and the findings from this interview further confirmed the findings from the individual interviews. Analysis of the transcripts from both the individual and focus group interviews further confirmed the findings of the study. Analysis of the transcripts showed consistent and repeated results. Additional data would not have produced different results as saturation was apparent.

Limitations of the Study

Remaining threats to internal validity. I did my best to come up with the most homogeneous group possible, but there were some factors I could not avoid. I felt if it was possible, that I should have all the teachers participating be teaching in the same school. Once you start going to different schools you are going to have to start dealing with different factors at the school such as a different administration, different policies and procedures, different type of students, facilities, etc. The criteria I came up with after looking at the list of teachers at the school was that they had to be teaching for at least five years at their current school and they had to have taught at least one class everyday for those five years. A few of those interviewed were administrators who have also been teaching and a couple teachers were also part-time teachers who teach one or two less classes than full-time teachers. Having these two different factors involved may have led to their responses to a few questions vary from the rest.

Another limitation was that a number of the teachers interviewed have children currently attending the school. When asked if there were any extrinsic factors that they feel keep them teaching at the school I received a few responses about having children at the school. I do not feel they were totally honest with me, but they could also have been. Teachers who teach at Hilton Head Christian Academy and who have children in kindergarten through twelfth grade
must have their children attend Hilton Head Christian Academy. Their children also receive a significant discount towards tuition. I thought this was going to be a very significant factor for the majority of the teachers who were interviewed and whose children attend but it surprisingly was not.

**Remaining threats to external validity.** As a result of the different schedules for the elementary, middle and high school teachers at Hilton Head Christian Academy, I was unable to get everyone to participate in the focus group interview. I did get twelve to participate which is over half of those that were individually interviewed so I felt that was enough to qualify as a good sample. The diversity of the teachers interviewed was also limited. Hilton Head Christian Academy is in a rural setting and the population at the school is 98% Caucasian. As a result, this study was highly focused on a select group of teachers, and, therefore, the results are not wholly generalizable to all teachers in the United States, especially those who may teach in a public school or an urban school. Although I feel the results from this study can be beneficial at any school whether it is a public or parochial in a large city or in the most rural area there is, the differences between various schools may cause them to view the results of this study differently.

**Suggestions for future research.** For future study, this study should be expanded to include a greater number of schools with diverse groups of students. It would be great to see this study replicated in the public school arena in order to understand how public school teachers differ in philosophy than the Christian, private school teachers that were interviewed for this study. This study could also be used to evaluate and research teachers who have only been teaching one or two years. If a teacher has only been teaching for one or two years, they will probably provide some different answers than those who have been teaching for five years or more.
Since this study focused on qualitative issues it would be good to see a qualitative study focusing on the student’s perspective. Interviewing a group of students to see what their perspective is on what makes a teacher successful in the classroom and what they feel makes a quality teacher. This could definitely be done as an action research study as you observe student’s interactions with different teachers.

Another area of future research would be to see how teacher retention is affected in the various subject areas. I know that there are certain subject areas such as social studies and physical education that have more applicants than open positions at the school. Nevertheless, there are certain subject areas that administrators are always struggling to find qualified applicants such as math, science and English. Focusing on one of these subject areas may give a more detailed perspective on the retention of teachers.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual Interview Questions:

1. What is the most difficult year as a teacher? Why?

2. At any point up to now in your teaching career did you want to quit? At what point was that?

3. What are the positive factors in your job as a teacher that have caused you to remain in your position?

4. What are the negative factors in your job as a teacher that have caused you to want to quit or migrate?

5. What advice would you give a first-year teacher with the intention of making sure they stay in the profession at least five years?

6. Are there any extrinsic factors that you feel make you stay in the position that you are in?

7. Did you have a mentor when you first started teaching? How did this relationship help you to continue teaching?

8. Have you ever wanted to leave teaching or teach at another school because someone else or a number of others were leaving?

9. What ideas do you have in order to help your administration retain teachers?

Focus Group Interview Questions:

1. If the first year is the hardest year for a teacher, what would be the two biggest things that can be done to make sure they make it through the year still excited about what they do?

2. I asked about the positives and negatives of teaching in your individual interviews. If you could pinpoint one thing that would make it or break it for you as far as returning
year after year what would it be?

3. Why is the rate of teacher retention higher in private schools when compared to public schools?

4. When it comes to salary, are there any ways a private school can supplement teachers salaries?

5. What are the key characteristics you would look for if you wanted to hire a teacher that is going to be effective and successful?

6. What suggestions do you have to help those who hire teachers at your school so that these teachers will stay at least five years or more like yourselves?

7. Do you feel that Christian teachers really have two responsibilities? To teach whatever their subject matter is but also to teach their students about Christ and how to live the Christian life?

8. Although unrealistic, what is your idea of the perfect administration when it comes to supporting its teachers?
APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I hope you had a wonderful summer and you have gotten off to a great start this year in your classroom. Over the last three summers I have been working towards my Masters in Education at Cedarville University. I have learned so much and hope to use the knowledge, ideas and strategies learned in class to enhance my position as guidance director here at Hilton Head Christian Academy.

As I near the completion of my masters, I will be working on my thesis this fall; this is my final project. I will be researching teacher’s perceptions on teacher retention. This is a very important issue in the United States today as the number of students in today’s schools continues to increase each year and the factors that affect teacher retention each year are not addressed effectively. The results of this research will inform schools on how they can better retain the teachers they have each year.

To achieve this goal, I need to interview you along with 19 other teachers here at Hilton Head Christian Academy. I will be asking you questions that will be used to properly assess the issue of teacher retention in today’s schools. I will also be conducting a focus group that will be made up of yourself and other teachers that have been interviewed for this project. The focus group interview questions will be follow up questions based on the data received from the individual interviews.

At this time I am requesting your permission to have your interview as well as the focus group interview taped and transcribed. All information from the interview will be kept confidential and names will be changed in any reports. Please sign the line below. I appreciate your cooperation. If you have any questions or concerned please call me.

Sincerely,

Trevor Creeden
59 Fifth Avenue
Bluffton, SC 29910
(843) 540-2232

Stephen S. Gruber, Ed. D
Education Department Chair
251 N. Main St.
Cedarville, OH 45314
(937) 766-7780

I agree to participate in all interviews needed for this study and give permission for my responses to the questions asked me in those interviews to be used for only the purposes of this study.

Participant’s Signature
Dear Participant,

I hope you had a wonderful summer and you have gotten off to a great start this year in your classroom. Over the last three summers I have been working towards my Masters in Education at Cedarville University. I have learned so much and hope to use the knowledge, ideas and strategies learned in class to enhance my position as guidance director here at Hilton Head Christian Academy.

As I near the completion of my masters, I will be working on my thesis this fall; this is my final project. I will be researching teacher’s perceptions on teacher retention. This is a very important issue in the United States today as the number of students in today’s schools continues to increase each year and the factors that affect teacher retention each year are not addressed effectively. The results of this research will inform schools on how they can better retain the teachers they have each year.

To achieve this goal, I need to interview twenty teachers here at Hilton Head Christian Academy. I will also be conducting a focus group that will be made up of the teachers that have been interviewed for this project. The focus group interview questions will consist of follow up questions based on the data received from the individual interviews.

At this time I am requesting your permission to use any teacher who has taught at least one class each year for five years or more at Hilton Head Christian Academy as my sample for the study. All the information from each interview will be kept confidential and names will be changed in any reports. Please sign the line below. I appreciate your cooperation. If you have any questions or concerned please e-mail me at tcreeden@hhca.org.

Sincerely,

Trevor Creeden

I approve of this study to be conducted at Hilton Head Christian Academy for the sole purpose of research. I give my permission for any teacher to participate in the study.

______________________________  ________________________________
School Official                  Title
References


