Teacher Retention: A Case Study in a High-Poverty, Low-Income School in South Carolina’s Corridor of Shame

A Doctoral Thesis

by

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Abstract

Attracting and retaining teachers in South Carolina’s I-95 Corridor of Shame districts has become increasingly difficult with attrition rates growing statistically higher every year. Consistent teacher attrition impedes student achievement, disrupts the learning environment, and costs school districts more money. The research question for this case study was: How has this high poverty, low-income, Title I school environment increased teacher retention rates, according to teachers who chose to persist? This research examined the teaching experiences of teachers who chose to persist in a school environment statistically similar to other high-poverty, low-income, Title I schools in South Carolina’s Corridor of Shame that exhibited much higher teacher attrition rates.

The data in this study was compiled through interviews with targeted questions as to why teachers chose to continually persist in a high-poverty, low-income school with the exception of being a highly rated school with a 90% teacher retention rate. For the purpose of this research study, data examination was the process of connecting and reviewing data with the intent to extract useful information, build on conclusions, and apply the outcomes to other situations. The interview data revealed the following identified strategies for improving retention: a necessary cultural change; the strong administrative/teacher rapport; positive environment; strong relationships and social cohesiveness; strong school community; and monitoring and focusing on student success. For other schools and school districts in the Corridor of Shame this study clearly shows that with the right mix of administration and teachers determined to make a necessary cultural change improvement is not only possible, but probable.
Key Words: Teacher attrition, Teacher retention, Burnout Theory, Human Capital Theory
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When my mom passed, I really had no one in my life to call family. I had a best friend named Melissa Wade that had been my very best friend for more than 30 years. Her family became my family. Today, I am known as “sister, aunt, sister-in-law, and adopted daughter” because her family took me in and made me one of their own. We call ourselves “The Wadey Bunch.” I have had needed support from my family and constant encouragement to never give up. I want to also dedicate my dissertation to Melissa, Rick, Meme, Curt, Heather, Jessie, and Ricky. These people make my world a happy place and make me want to be a better person. I’m so thankful Melissa decided to take up for a little “Cabbage Patch” dork in the 6th grade. Melissa’s friendship and support have never faltered after all these years. She has stood by me all along. That’s why I have to say I am very blessed and thankful for all God has allowed me to have in my life. Finally, without Him I would have given up. Here I am today, blessed and ready to see what is next!
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Chapter I: Introduction

In 2014, the Episcopal Church in South Carolina and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston stated in their *Statement on Public Education* that “we are charged with leading the faithful in ways that direct our energies for the building up of the kingdom of God and to make a difference around us” (Gugliemone & Von Rosenberg, 2014, p. 1). Both religious entities in 2014 went further to say that “in support of the American experiment in democracy, our nation has realized that education is an essential component to equipping members of society who can in turn help lead the United States of America into a better future” (p. 1). These religious entities realized that public education was an important component of ensuring success for all South Carolinians, and reiterated their stance, citing “disparities in the delivery of education,” because they are located in economically challenged, often rural counties that they went on to call “a Corridor of Shame in our state” (p. 2). The Episcopal Church and the Charleston Diocese posited the following questions:

(a) how can the next generation rise to modern challenges when they are not given the superior education they deserve;

(b) how can students overcome inadequate funding and low expectations at a time when a 21st century economy demands more of young people? (p. 2).

According to the Education Trust, Fallen (2007) “reinforced these findings and indicated that a teacher’s influence is twenty times greater than any other single factor for learning in the classroom” (p. 16) Deangelis & Presley’s (2007) investigation, which included over thirty years of data on teacher attrition, found that this topic has been “a major area of concern among new teachers, concerning policy makers and administrators” (p.13). Their prior research has provided “valuable information regarding
the teacher and organizational factors associated with attrition from the profession and teacher mobility across schools” (p. 13). There are many reasons teachers choose to leave the classroom. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) cited four primary reasons: salaries; poor administrative support; lack of teacher influence and autonomy; and student discipline problems (p. 11). Kukla-Acevedo’s study (2009) focused on “the fact that work place conditions were the primary reason first year teachers stayed in a school environment and veteran teachers were not as influenced by workplace conditions” (p.448).

This study examined ways to retain teachers at a high-poverty, low-income, Title I high school in the rural area of South Carolina known as the Corridor of Shame. According to Wilson, (2013) “North Beacon High School’s district was rated the worst school district in South Carolina in 1974” (pg. 8). Later, according to the South Carolina Report Card for 2005, North Beacon High School was rated as At-Risk for both the Absolute Rating and the Growth Rating. Between 2008 and 2014, the school began to show growth in state report card ratings and teacher retention. Based on the South Carolina Department of Education State Report Card for 2014, teacher retention went from 79% in 2008 to 90% in 2014.

The following study investigates the statistical increase in teacher retention at North Beacon High School, from 2008-2014. This study was particularly critical to the schools that were statistically similar to it. It provides insight into how North Beacon High School recruited and successfully retained teachers. The data gathered serves as a possible basis for other statistically similar schools to create a more stable institution in the future. The research examines the teaching experiences of teachers who chose to persist in a school environment statistically similar to other high-poverty, low-income,
Title I schools in South Carolina’s *Corridor of Shame* – a region that exhibits much higher teacher attrition rates.

A case study was employed to investigate reasons for high teacher retention and to propose methods for other statistically similar schools to strengthen teacher retention through teacher interviews and school report cards. Other sources important to utilize were the South Carolina State Department of Education data available and a Human Needs Assessment that studied the specific needs of South Carolina schools in the I-95 *Corridor of Shame*. By examining teacher retention influences at North Beacon High School, this study offers school districts possible ways to retain highly qualified teachers with the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement.

**Research Problem**

Johnson found that “in 1993, thirty-six of South Carolina’s most impoverished rural school districts rallied together to sue the state of South Carolina for failing to provide “a minimally adequate education” for all its students” (2014, p. 4). Six of the school districts involved in the case were in a central location known as *The Corridor of Shame*, on Interstate 95, which passes all the way through South Carolina. Johnson also reported that 14% of first-year teachers left the classroom because teachers who accepted jobs in the *Corridor of Shame* school districts were usually not properly prepared to effectively handle the daily aspects of what happened in the classroom and school environment (p. 7). CERRA’s data also revealed that “some districts, regardless of certification area, struggled to hire and retain highly qualified teachers due to their geographic location in the state. These South Carolina school districts were located in
three regions: Pee Dee Region, The Midlands of SC, and the Low country of SC” (pg. 4).

According to Garrett (2015), “over 39% of teachers in South Carolina did not return to their prior teaching positions with 16.7% of teachers taking positions in different school districts and 11.3% changing professions entirely” (p. 5). Fewer teachers were graduating and more veteran teachers were leaving, which would ultimately create a state-wide teacher shortage (Garrett, 2015, p. 7).

Attracting and retaining teachers in South Carolina’s Corridor of Shame rural school districts continues to be a high priority in the state legislature. The continuous problem of keeping teachers in the classroom has been deteriorating for many years. Teacher retention was a problem because of “funding disparities, high teacher turnover, and difficulty recruiting teachers” (Peske & Haycock, 2006, p. 54). It has always been of the utmost importance to keep teachers in the classroom by offering incentives that encourage teacher retention through job satisfaction and professional support.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

In a time of ever-increasing demands on teachers the principal considerations that established why a teacher chose to remain or leave the profession was completely worthy of an in-depth investigation. Kain (2011) shows that “Teacher attrition has grown by 50 percent over the past fifteen years” (p. 4). Kain also found that “school districts suffer money loss impacted by stretched budgets and makes the problem of hiring teachers an insurmountable struggle for school leaders” (p. 6). This situation was particularly evident in low-performing, high-poverty schools in rural areas across the United States. Teacher attrition is not only a location issue for South Carolina, but it affects other rural areas in the United States as well. From the perspective of those who direct the schools,
contradictory numbers in attrition versus retention created excessive stress on the school system and contributed to educator staffing issues.

According to the South Carolina State Department of Education Annual Yearly Progress Reports (2014), six of the school districts in the Corridor of Shame experienced a 20% or higher teacher turnover rate each year. With evidence of this turnover rate, the rural Corridor of Shame school districts in South Carolina became revolving doors for teachers. According to the NCES (2007), one-third of all operating school districts in the United States represented rural demographics. Since there was such a need for teachers in rural areas, districts employed inexperienced and less qualified teachers (SCTQ, 2004). According to a study by the Rural School and Community Trust, school districts across the United States fell behind in funding and prioritizing rural education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). South Carolina ranked as a high priority state for funding needs, behind only Alabama and Mississippi, with a goal of retaining highly qualified, satisfied teachers in every classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This high teacher turnover rate in Corridor of Shame school districts resulted in a lack of proper funding and equity. These school districts continually have to deal with this as well as lack of access to technology, buildings that barely pass code laws, and a sense of feeling undervalued. However, the overall result of high teacher attrition rates was a decrease in student achievement and academic success in the classroom.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Little has been published about South Carolina’s Corridor of Shame. Reports on the South Carolina Department of Education’s website showed evidence of deficiencies in rural South Carolina public schools. There were articles in local newspapers, a website
called *Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina’s Rural Schools*, and a video documentary created by Bud Ferillo, an education professor at the University of South Carolina. The documentary and the website chronicled the plight of the I-95 school districts’ struggles with monetary funding from the state, out-of-date facilities, and a continuous loss of industry in depressed areas. Congressmen Lindsey Graham stated, “If I had a child living in one of those counties, I would want relief” (Ferillo, 2006, p. 4). He further explained that, “it’s not that we are being prejudiced, it’s just that there are no industries and the areas are economically deprived based on the fact that property taxes fund our public education” (p. 5). Property taxes and industry in each district defined what monies were available to school districts. There were obvious economic disparities throughout the state as far as allocation of monies that were available to depressed school districts.

**Relating the Discussion to Audiences**

Very few studies on teacher attrition and retention efforts exist either. Ingersoll (2001) found that more “empirical studies were necessary to begin attempting to study the reasons for high teacher attrition rates and retention efforts within specific areas of the United States and focus had to be more on what was important to teachers” (p. 498). Ingersoll (2001) stated, “research seemed to promote positive working conditions that facilitated success” (p. 507). Without feeling a sense of pride and confidence in their work, teachers “left the education profession for a better job in the private sector” (Nieto, 2003, p. 14). Just like anyone else, teachers want a rewarding work environment with the possibility for professional development. Few documented studies concentrated on improving the situation in the *Corridor of Shame* school districts. The available literature
related to teacher retention in the Corridor of Shame delved into researching strategies school districts could use to implement to retaining teachers in the classroom.

This study offers a descriptive account of the established challenges that schools faced in the I-95 Corridor of Shame. Teachers, administrators, students, families, and communities were also interested in the findings. The Corridor of Shame labeled school districts in South Carolina were especially interested in the findings. Revealing the causes of high teacher retention at North Beacon High School allowed other school districts to have a platform to which they could model their future retention initiatives.

Significance of Research Problem

High teacher attrition rates affected all levels of education from kindergarten classrooms to secondary classrooms. There were a variety of reasons reportedly responsible for teacher dissatisfaction that have been reported in the literature. Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff (2011) cited in their study that “turnover is considered to have a disruptive organizational influence; all members of a school community are vulnerable, including staying teachers and their students” (p. 17). Loeb et. al. (2011) found that “such disruptive accounts of turnover, even when leaving teachers are equally as effective as those who replace them, can still impact students’ achievement” (p. 17). Loeb et. al. stated that “teachers who felt their work was appreciated would be contributing members of the school culture” (p. 2). According to Ingersoll, (2002) improving the “environment for teachers would end up with positive results and there would be lower attrition rates along with higher retention rates for school districts that would choose to implement needed changes” (p.7). In relation to increasing teacher retention, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) cited that “in addition to developing strong subject matter knowledge,
all teachers should have a basic understanding of how people learn and develop, as well as how children acquire and use language, which is the currency of education” (p. 42). This can create strong teachers and ultimately improve the teacher retention issue across all avenues of education.

The most straightforward way to find out the important information needed for this study was to find a school with a high teacher retention rate and interview several teachers on the faculty, including the principals. It was important to address this issue on a local level rather than studying statistics about schools from other states. The issue with the Corridor of Shame is specific to South Carolina, but the results can apply to school districts with similar problems all over the county.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

The research question for this case study was as follows: *How has this high poverty and low-income Title I school environment increased teacher retention and reduced high teacher attrition rates, according to teachers who chose to persist in this environment?*

**Theoretical Framework**

For this case study, Maslach and Jackson’s (1981) and Maslach and Leiter’s (1999) teacher burnout theories “were used in conjunction with the human capital theory presented by Myung, Martinez, and Nordstrum” (2013). These three theoretical lenses guided this study of teacher attrition and retention in the I-95 corridor. In addition, Knauer (2015) merged teacher burnout theory and human capital theory.
The present study used Maslach and Leiter’s (1996) burnout theory to explore why teachers at high-poverty, low-income schools chose to leave the classroom. This theoretical framework applied to teacher attrition and teacher retention efforts in the Corridor of Shame. Once defined in accordance with the specifications of this study, burnout and human capital theories helped to uncover the reasons why teachers left a specific school or classroom. They also provided a lens to analyze the findings of this study and suggested possible solutions to keep teachers in the classroom environment.

The study focused on schools in areas where student achievement and the tax base for industry were low, teacher turnover was high, and states struggled to properly fund school districts.

**Teacher burnout theory.** Freudenberger (1974) coined the term *burnout* as part of the research lexicon to illustrate the “failure to perform successfully in a job as an effect of long-time, job-related strain and anxiety” (p. 35). Workers in the human resource field have become a focus for researchers because of the related emphasis on stress and burnout (Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986, pg. 287). With respect to teachers, the potential for stress was high because classes have had a larger number of students for extended periods of time. Prolonged exposure to a high stress environment would almost certainly lead to out-of-character teacher behavior with the primary focus being on the teacher’s whole well-being as well as student achievement.

Kyriacou (2001) defined teacher burnout as “a state of whole being exhaustion and withdrawal “which results when a teacher has failed to be proactive with work stress over a long period of time” (p. 28). For the purposes of the study, the following definition of teacher burnout was used. Teacher burnout was clearly explained as a whole-being
stressful mind, state, and body, occurring as a result of reactions that have become uncontrollable in a teacher’s daily life. This reaction to teacher burnout usually supports a pessimistic view of teaching or creates a “fight or flight” state of mind. In addition to leaving the profession, teachers had other reactions to burnout. As a result of teacher burnout across all facets of the profession “doctors have received numerous requests from teachers to see them based on all aspects of the teaching profession that threaten a positive, state of mind and well-being” (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005). The connection between teacher burnout as well as teacher attrition led more researchers into deeper research about the causes and results of teacher burnout. Burnout has been considered a top reason as to why teachers choose to depart from education with the intention of going into private sector jobs that provide less stress and more opportunity for advancement.

According to Maslach and Jackson’s (1981) documented research on burnout theory showed how “teacher burnout highly influenced classroom practices and student achievement” (p. 109). Burnouts, according Maslach and Jackson, referred “to teachers who negatively impacted student performance and negatively impacted the profession as a whole” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, pg. 110). In other words, burnouts were the teachers who negatively impacted the profession rather than leaving the profession, never giving another teacher an opportunity to create high student engagement and positive outcomes.

Teacher burnout had a “distinct meaning associated with chronic migraines, an apathetic attitude, mental exhaustion, and physical exhaustion” (Maslach, et. al. 1996, p.113). The chronic migraines, mental exhaustion, and physical exhaustion referred to the physical result of working in a continually stressful job environment without any kind of mental or physical relief. Mental exhaustion and physical exhaustion referred to the stress
the mind and body undergoes in a continual “fight or flight” setting. Maslach and Jackson (1981) found that teacher burnout became evident when teachers were “being defensive, feeling overwhelmed, in a constant state of anxiety and overwhelmed with worry” (p. 93).

Teacher burnout was a response to many mitigating factors. Teacher burnout was a prolonged response to overwhelming job stressors that were consistently experienced on a daily basis. It affected job performance, the classroom setting, and student achievement. Teacher burnout also affected the way teachers responded to school environments that stemmed from a lack of leader support. Teacher burnout was a consequence side of the stressful environment in which teachers work daily. Striving daily to create an engaging environment, overcome student misbehavior, and live up to other daily expectations of being a teacher had negative effects that showed themselves in the form of exhaustion, frustration, cynicism, and depression.

**Human capital theory.** In the field of education, investment in human capital was the largest investment school districts made through salary and benefits. The importance of building a stronger work-force was of the utmost importance because instructional staff most directly influence student outcomes. School districts focused on outcome-based evaluations, accountability measures for teachers, and an input-centered approach to teacher experience, which strongly influenced teaching strategies and student accomplishment (Aslam, Kingdon, Raswal, & Das, 2013, p.119). Outcome-based evaluations, accountability measures for teachers, and input focused on teacher experience were not effective indicators of a strong teacher workforce and not effective in retaining highly, qualified teachers. Human capital theory combined the talents, skills,
abilities, intelligence, training, judgment, and knowledge possessed by a collective grouping of educators. The total collective represented endless opportunities to accomplish a variety of goals in different professional education environments. Harnessing the human capital already available through the methods of acquiring, sustaining, developing, and evaluating teachers allowed school districts to reach goals of higher teacher retention and higher student achievement.

The human capital framework posed by Myung (2013) functioned through four correlated, multiple processes working in conjunction with each other. The four subsets posed in the human capital theory framework were “acquiring, developing, sustaining, and evaluating effective human capital” (Myung, 2013, p. 35). School districts were mostly focused on student achievement scores and teacher retention rates, but the ability to evaluate effective human capital went much deeper than just surface scores, raw data, and percentages.

**Acquiring human capital.** Getting the right human capital into the right positions was a necessary aspect of creating a more solid teacher pool of professionals. School districts in small areas had the biggest problem recruiting teachers because of limited salary, late hiring times, and little to offer talented teachers. Small school district’s human resources systems were also unorganized and dysfunctional (Liu & Johnson, 2006). It was important for school districts to be focused and specific in what they were looking for in the available human capital. The timing had to be right for school districts to begin the hiring process. Often, low-income school districts waited until late summer to begin hiring. By that time, most highly-qualified teachers were either committed to contracts with their own school districts or have accepted positions in other school districts. Once a
teacher was committed to a contract, it could not be broken unless there were extenuating circumstances. School districts had to set their budgets at a reasonable time to avoid limited teacher availability. Schools and districts also needed to have an idea of how many staff to hire. States and school districts should have worked together to make finances available for difficult to staff schools to limit the risk of budget failure due to ineffective hiring practices. A more streamlined and organized hiring process would enable districts to be more selective of applicant qualification (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003). Highly qualified applicants were more likely to remain longer and eventually be more effective if hiring practices were greatly improved (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003, p. 601). The main problems in hiring effective teachers were the timetable, job availability, and organization of hiring processes.

**Developing human capital.** Once teachers were hired and placed into a school district, the environment-to-teacher-match was deemed either a success or failure. A variety of mitigating factors influenced whether a teacher would be effective in the classroom. Would new teachers be properly supported? Would new teachers feel pushed out on their own into an unknown environment? Novice teachers faced concerns about classroom practice and student acceptance that needed to be handled before they could move onto engaging teaching strategies (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003, p. 603).

**Sustaining human capital.** Once the right educators were in the right classroom environment, the next challenge was to keep them teaching effectively there. Upward achieving educators needed to recognize that opportunities for advancement were available in their school and the building administrators would work with them to reach their goals (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 502). Multiple paths to career improvement enhanced
teacher retention and teacher promotion. For example, it was important for a career
teacher to move into gradual stages of leadership (e.g. mentor teacher, master teacher,
building administrator) (Ingersoll, 2001, 504). The possibility for higher career rankings
had the potential to promote effective leaders from the teaching pool. As a result, being
given more responsibility would increase the teacher’s options for staying in the school
and school district (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 517).

**Evaluating human capital.** Evaluation was the solution to retaining high-
performing teachers in the professional environment. In response to the feedback
received in the classroom environment, teachers were given random, intermittent, and not
actionable feedback. Effective feedback was usually given to teachers and based on trust.
The relationships between novice teachers, principals, and peers could sometimes be
shaky and unreliable. Feedback, if not handled professionally with regard for another
person’s feelings, would present challenges at the building level and the district level.
Feedback needed to remain focused on teacher improvement and avoiding personal
attacks. Sensitivity was an absolute requirement for professional feedback. Individuals
without the sensitivity to deliver feedback in a professional manner unintentionally
caused problems within a school environment. Another common problem with feedback
was ambiguity. Feedback needed to be informative, create discourse for improvement,
and promote positive elements of the teacher’s classroom environment rather than simply
reporting negative aspects of the classroom environment. The practices that were used to
measure effective teaching, give feedback, and establish strategies to improve teaching
have been powerful guides to: (a) tactically bettering teaching strategies; (b) motivate
teachers who already excel; and (c) human resources and building administrators to be
transparent in their intentions with staff members. Feedback on teaching practice informed a teacher’s needed instructional improvement, allowed for positive self-reflection, allowed professional growth, and encouraged the growth of a professional learning community (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Feedback helped the teacher grow in his or her subject area to provide more content-focused, engaging lessons for students and had made teachers have an overall positive feeling about their contribution to education.

Summary

Recognizing the reasons for teacher attrition and retention in the Corridor of Shame allowed school districts to develop incentives to help school districts retain teachers. This study examined the literature encompassing the problems surrounding teacher attrition and retention in the Corridor of Shame. Teacher burnout theory illustrated the reasons why teachers experience high levels of burnout in the profession. Human capital theory aligned with teacher burnout theory to illustrate that through acquiring, sustaining, developing, and evaluating human capital in education, school districts could reach their goals of higher teacher retention and higher student achievement. The literature reviewed for this study in Chapter 2 was focused on the problems surrounding teacher attrition, why teachers chose to stay, and why teachers chose to leave the Corridor of Shame school districts in South Carolina.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Literature Review Questions

Teacher burnout and human capital theories laid the foundation for the exploration of teacher attrition and retention through the literature. The literature review was guided by the following questions:

- Why was the teacher attrition rate high in American schools and South Carolina school districts?
- Why did teachers choose to stay in American schools and South Carolina school districts?
- How did teacher retention increase in American schools and South Carolina school districts?

Introduction

In the early 1970s, author Pat Conroy took a job as a first-year teacher on Daufuskie Island in Beaufort County, South Carolina. He chronicled his experiences in his memoir *The Water is Wide* (1972). Conroy (1972) stated, “what I saw shook me to my very being” (p. 5). His students thought, “Savannah was the largest city in the world and [he] was amazed that the students could not put their simplest thoughts on paper” (p. 5). Conroy spent one year on Daufuskie Island. He shared his personal conclusions about the state of rural education in South Carolina in the documentary, *Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina’s Rural Schools* (2006) by Bud Ferillo. Conroy concluded that “very little had changed in the rural school districts in SC since the 1970’s, students live each day never knowing the promise of tomorrow. The children were “imprisoned by the circumstance of birth” (p. 5). Pat Conroy witnessed a segment of South Carolina’s
educational system that eventually came to be known as the I-95 Corridor of Shame, school districts that included continually low-performing, financially struggling schools, perennially unable to offer their students even a minimally adequate education. The origin of the problem rested on the school districts’ struggle with a lack of industry and proper state funding to offset the cost of educating students.

**Teacher Attrition: Why Teachers Leave**

Ingersoll (2001) discovered that “teachers who go into education with lofty ideals of being the change agent in the lives of their students were hit with a hard reality of students living in poverty, attending continually low-performing schools with almost no hope of a better quality education” (p. 261). Teachers who accepted jobs in “school districts that are rural and poverty stricken were not properly prepared to deal with the daily aspects of what happened in the classroom and school environment” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 265). The end result was that teachers left the school or even the profession in a state of burnout or cynicism. This was one of the most prevalent reasons for teachers to leave classrooms in impoverished areas of South Carolina. They moved toward more affluent school districts with higher pay, more opportunities for advancement, and opportunities for more relevant professional development experiences.

Teacher attrition was delineated in two ways: when a person left teaching totally or when she or he changed school settings. The impact of attrition on the school was the same when teachers left as when new faculty members had to be hired. A new faculty member must fit in, adjust, and orient to a new environment. Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2007) determined that teacher attrition ultimately negatively impacted students, promoted organizational instability, and limited cohesiveness across school
environments. Deeper investigation into teacher attrition showed that more teachers left for reasons other than retirement or family reasons, and the impact of this attrition on schools was costly in time, money, and upholding of the school culture (Ingersoll, 1999; Marso & Pigge, 1996). The ultimate cost was to administrators’ time and the districts’ money to recruit and hire new faculty. Furthermore, attrition also represented “the shaky state of education and raised the issue of replacing qualified teachers in the classroom” (Ingersoll, 1999, p. 26). As a result, teachers in their first years of education were the ones that would most likely leave the profession.

According to McCreight, (2000) “3.1 million educators were working in some educational capacity in school districts in the United States at during the beginning of the 21st century” (p. 502). The U.S. Department of Education (2007) estimated that “approximately 150,000 new teachers were hired in the U.S. to replace those that have retired or left the profession” (p. 3). Researchers could not control retirements and location changes, so they focused on creating profiles for teachers who left for other reasons. Ingersoll (2001) noticed that while “retirement factored into teacher attrition, it was not a major factor in impending teacher shortages” (p. 521). The problem, however, was when teachers chose to leave before they reach retirement age to seek other avenues of opportunity (Ingersoll, 1999, p. 28).

The study of teacher attrition began in the 1970s and 1980s when educators first saw a possible teacher shortage. The days of long waiting lists of teachers during the 1960’s were over. Student enrollments were growing rapidly and schools witnessed faculty members entering and leaving teaching more quickly than in the past (Marso & Pigge, 1996). Several clear demographic indicators predicted levels of teacher stress and
burnout. These included gender, age, experience, and teacher-rated school culture. In addition, different aspects of school culture contributed to teacher satisfaction and burnout levels.

Age and years of classroom experience also influenced attrition. Teachers with more “experience were less likely to leave than those with fewer years of experience” (Haggstrom, Darling-Hammond, & Grissmer, 1988). Also, teachers with 10 to 25 years of teaching experience were “much less likely to leave teaching than teachers in their first five years; however, teachers with only five years of teaching experience were most likely to exit the profession altogether” (Haggstrom et. al., 1998). School and staffing survey data showed that “math and science teachers believed salary, benefits, and working conditions affected their job fulfillment” (NCES, 2006). In addition, teachers with skills that crossed into the private sector were “more likely to exit the teaching profession than making the decision to stay” (NCES, 2006).

Salary is clearly a prime indicator of why teachers decided against teaching. Salary was listed as the top reason for teachers’ decisions to depart entirely from the profession. Teaching was once a well-paying position for women compared to other available professional jobs, but that was no longer the case. While low salaries were a key factor in teacher attrition, there were also other important factors. Fox and Certo (1999), McCreight (2000), Boe (1997), and Lieberman and Miller (1992) brought to light a variety of factors that contributed to teacher attrition, including insufficient opportunities for a successful career in teaching and a feeling of isolation from other colleagues in the classroom. In their study of public school teachers in North Carolina and Michigan, Murnane (1991) established that salary significantly affected a teacher's
decision to remain in teaching early in their career but weakened with experience. The NCES (2005) reported that 85% of teachers cite workload as their primary reason for departure from the profession. However, Darling-Hammond (1999) and McCreight (2000) noted a strong connection between salary and teacher attrition; low salaries were high indicators of teacher turnover. Bloland and Selby (1980) stated that “Regardless of advanced degrees and credentials acquired, a classroom teacher still appeared one step above the student and one step below the lowest level administrator (p. 18).

High levels of credentials or years of experience were irrelevant. After facing so many obstacles, some of which were difficult to overcome, potentially talented teachers often moved on to other careers. Teachers who wished to advance professionally moved out of teaching and into administration. They left education when opportunities for career advancement were scarce or moved into the private sector and worked in corporate positions. Teachers often felt less satisfied with their careers when this transition occurred (Fox & Certo, 1999). Boe (1997) found that teachers usually stay in the classroom during the course of their career without many opportunities for advancement, even teachers who showed promise for advancement were not given accolades for superior performance.

In addition to economics and the shortage of advancement opportunities, a prevalent theme in the literature on teacher attrition was the sense of isolation that many teachers felt in a classroom. Depending on their grade and subject, many teachers found themselves in a classroom up to eight hours a day with little to no adult contact. Boe (1997) pointed to the sense of frustration stemming from lack of peer contact and general
isolation. Fox and Certo (1999) also mentioned isolation as a source of teacher attrition with teachers leaving the profession because of feelings of isolation, overwhelming responsibilities, and no time for reflection.

**Teacher Retention: Why Teachers Stay**

Brown (2015) reported that “seventy percent of beginning teachers stayed in the profession for at least five years” (p. 75). Since 2007, new teachers “stayed in the classroom at dramatically higher rates and teachers in high-poverty schools, defined in this study as those with more than 80% of students eligible for federally subsidized lunches, stayed at statistically similar rates as all beginning teachers” (p. 76). Like any professional, teachers sometimes left when they decided that teaching was not a good fit for them, when they got married, when they had kids, or when they moved to a new place. Given what was known about how classroom teachers improved their classroom practice during their first few years, the fact that beginning teachers stayed could actually mean that many more students today have access to more effective teachers than students did before 2007 (p. 76).

According to the NEA, there needed to be a closer study conducted “to observe the reason teachers who are already in the teaching profession and why they chose to stay” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006, p. 75). The Center for American Progress calculated mathematic results of teacher retention utilizing national surveys from the U.S. Department of Education’s NCES. The three primary surveys utilized for the study were the Schools and Staffing Survey 2007-2008, the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study, and the Schools and Staffing Survey 2011-2012. Evidence suggested that new teachers stayed in teaching for at least three years to five years.
Financial Incentives

By 2011-12, Brown (2015) found that “86% of teachers beginning with mentors continued teaching whereas those without first-year mentors, compared to 71%, decided to leave teaching. Salaries that were higher than 40,000 dollars were a likely factor for teachers to stay in the profession” (Brown, 2015). Teachers who found jobs in high poverty schools where 50% of the students were at or below poverty level “were predicted to leave the profession after the first year” (Brown, 2015).

The expectation of future higher salaries is a worthwhile incentive for teachers to stay in education longer. Miller (2012) found that “states have attempted to make attractive incentives available to individuals who had plans of going into education, especially in hard to staff schools with a poverty rating over 80 %.” Miller also found that the “federal government has several loans that offer incentives for teachers to enter and stay in education through help in paying off student loans.” Miller (2012) cited the fact that “education students can also take out education loans, work in the classroom for a time, and have the government pay off the loans used for education.”

Teacher Needs Assessment

In 2009, Frances Marion University and South Carolina State University published a study based on the physical human needs found in the I-95 Corridor of Shame, which found the most the most important perceived educational needs in this area were teacher improvement, increased support of community schools, and suggestions for ways to divert needed state and federal monies to the whole area. These perceived needs aligned with existing research about smaller, rural school districts. Teachers chose to stay in rural school districts despite challenges because there were noted advantages for
working in such an environment that meet the personal needs of individual teachers.

Watts (2016) found “that these needs included fewer behavioral issues, greater opportunities for one on one instruction, more teacher autonomy, and smaller class size.” Other influences from the “teachers’ perspective included a safe school environment and family living near their place of work” (Watts, 2016). Watts (2016) also discussed a “study from Nebraska that noted teachers remained in their teaching positions because of the opportunity to invest in student and parent relationships, enjoyed rural living, and experienced safety in home and school.”

**Teacher Retention in Hard-to-Staff School Districts**

**Teacher retention in high-poverty school districts.** McElroy (2007) “found in his research that were many rural school districts with money and location issues across the nation that have difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers that can provide instruction that allows for student achievement” (p.67). McElroy (2007) also noted that “teacher quality was the most important school-related variable affecting student achievement” (p. 68). According to Darling-Hammond, (1999) “these difficult to staff schools have experienced high teacher flight at higher rates than schools that faced less challenges on a daily basis” (p. 64). Extenuating factors contributed to school staffing difficulties. O’Malley (2009) found that “teachers felt isolated when they received little support from building leaders.” Other issues affecting teacher retention included a “lack of faculty influence on decisions that affected student learning, inadequate ongoing relevant professional development, lack of academic student success, inadequate time for planning and instruction, and excessive classroom intrusions” (O’Malley, 2009).
According to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), (2016) “70% of principals had significant sway over a teacher’s decision to stay or leave” (p. 18). There was a significant need in public schools to create an environment that was conducive to teachers feeling respected and that their needs taken into consideration. The AFT (2016) found that in order for teachers to be happy at work, principals should “clearly communicate high expectations, create a school culture that promotes mutual respect, and makes teachers feel supported” (p. 17). Principals who failed to create this kind of school environment did not retain the best teachers. In the AFT study on teacher retention, it was found that “attrition rates were higher in schools with weak instructional cultures” (p. 21). School culture and working conditions were considerable problems at struggling, high poverty schools.

The best possible avenues for building leaders to make headway in creating a positive school culture was to survey teachers and provide data that showed the true outlook of the school’s culture and working conditions. Glossing over the truth can make statistics look better than they actually are but doing so takes away the veracity of the survey and the building leader. Retaining highly qualified teachers required commitment from both building leaders and teachers. The best way to improve a problem was to look at it honestly, put aside differences, and work together for the ultimate goal of higher student achievement and engagement.

**Teacher retention in rural school districts.** Prior studies in the area of teacher retention highlight key factors but provided limited knowledge on teacher retention in small school districts. Many researchers focused only on non-rural teachers (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005, pg. 173). Isolation was documented as one of the deciding factors in not
taking a job in a rural school district” (Miller, 2012). As a result, jobs in traditionally agrarian and industrial fields began to decrease (Miller, 2012). Smaller communities also had the disadvantage of “fewer places to shop, fewer opportunities for family outings, and poor access to decent health care” (Miller, 2012). Teacher retention rates were higher when teachers felt a stronger connection to the school and the community” (Miller, 2012).

Rural principals had trouble locating teachers who were a right fit with the small community surroundings; the local school system was an extension of the local community. Rural school districts struggled to find teachers who knew the school and the community. According to Burke, (2007) the “teacher who is a right fit for a small community would be state certified to teach more than one subject or level” (p. 138). The background and experience of teachers were important, especially for culturally diverse communities. Marketable facts in the staffing process for rural schools needed to be centered on the positive points of teaching in a small community including “fewer serious discipline problems, individualized instruction, and an opportunity to provide higher levels of student achievement” (Boylan & Bandy, 1994; Lemke, 1994).

**Teacher retention in South Carolina school districts.** In South Carolina, the findings from the Fall 2015 Supply and Demand Survey from the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) showed a “gap between teacher supply and demand that has continued to widen” (CERRA, 2015). CERRA (2015) research also showed that the number of teachers leaving the profession has continued to rise at an alarming rate, as does the percentage of teachers leaving early on in their careers. The Supply and Demand Study also “showed that over 5,300 teachers did not
return to their teaching positions in 2016” (CERRA, 2015). The number of graduates eligible for teacher certification intensified this issue. Over the last five years, on average, only 2,180 graduates completed a South Carolina teacher education program. The Supply and Demand Survey (CERRA, 2015) showed that of the teachers who did not return at the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, 39% left in their first five years and 14% left after just one year or less in the classroom. This occurrence has, unfortunately, become noticeably trend-worthy as these figures rose from 34% and 13% last year, and even more so from the prior year (CERRA, 2015).

According to CERRA research (2015), “school districts, regardless of certification area, struggled to hire and retain teachers due to their geographic location in the state.” Twenty districts with excessive teacher turnover were targeted through the Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive. One incentive was tuition reimbursement for certain certified teachers to either add a critical need subject area or pursue graduate coursework in understanding children in poverty. Teachers who added a critical need subject area helped address the ongoing challenges to fill vacancies in these areas. Teachers who “pursued graduate coursework in poverty learned tools and strategies to more effectively relate to and provide instruction to their students, resulting in a greater degree of job satisfaction and a higher rate of retention” (CERRA, 2015). Turner, executive director of CERRA, found that “South Carolina is moving in the right direction with these initiatives to recruit teachers into underserved schools” (2015). As evidenced by the supply and demand numbers for teachers, there is “still work to do to ensure that public school districts do not face the consequences of a statewide teacher shortage” (CERRA, 2015).
Strategies for Increasing Teacher Retention

**Nationwide strategies.** Collective bargaining “stabilized the teaching force in hard-to-staff schools” (AFT, 2016). Schools offered teachers housing and transportation incentives but could not solve all the problems that plague “hard-to-staff school districts with incentives” (AFT, 2016). Teaching in a hard-to-staff school district is a choice “teachers make because they want to make a difference in some aspect of a student’s growth and achievement” (AFT, 2016). The AFT also suggested the following strategies for recruiting teachers in hard to staff school districts:

(a) induction programs with intensive mentoring components that focus on the needs of teachers to ensure students success;

(b) the possibility of paid learning programs outside of the school day that provide opportunities for teachers to focus on issues that will improve student learning;

(c) incentives for recruiting special groups of teachers who have needed skills and expertise to transfer into the schools; and

(d) teacher housing and transportation incentives

Research-based programs and practices can also help teachers transition into a school with possible financial and student behavioral issues. Without proper training for teachers coming into a high-needs school environment, failure is imminent due to a lack of proper guidelines and strategies to guide teacher, student, and administrative interactions.

**South Carolina strategies.** Teachers who are either hesitant to accept a teaching position in South Carolina’s rural areas or would otherwise pass up opportunities in such school districts, Gov. Haley proposed incentives to attract talented, highly-qualified teachers to
smaller, rural school districts. On January 29, 2016, Gov. Haley presented a budget that included incentives to attract potential teaching talent to areas in need. Teach for America (TFA) is another program supported by the Rural Teaching Initiative for recruiting, retaining, and distributing highly effective teachers throughout the state, especially in rural school districts of South Carolina. This program was designed to bring teachers into classrooms by recruiting and training college graduates who would commit to teach for two years in public schools.

The incentives outlined in Governor Haley’s plan paid tuition for college students who agreed to teach in a high-turnover district for eight years after graduating. The next incentive listed was for teachers who had already finished college; they would have their student loans repaid in return for a pledge to teach in a high-turnover district for four years. Another incentive for teachers in their first five years was a salary increase for going to a high-turnover district: a salary commensurate with five years of classroom experience. An incentive put in place for teachers with more than five years of experience would encourage them to go to graduate school at the state's expense in exchange for teaching in a high-turnover district for four years. The state offered teachers a loan that would be forgiven if they taught critical subjects or in districts with high poverty or low performance. Would-be teachers could borrow up to $15,000 from the state, all eligible for forgiveness. In the Times and Democrat (Garrett), Haley states that:

Some teachers who go to the rural schools to take advantage of the loan-forgiveness program will stay in those districts and become part of the community…A lot of times, when they go to the rural school districts, they stay
there, they meet their spouse there, they make friends there, they become part of the community (2015, p. 13).

Other opportunities to increase retention in South Carolina’s rural school districts were supported by The South Carolina Center for Teacher Recruitment or CERRA (1998). Founded in 1986, the organization supported programs and activities that promoted high teacher retention. According to CERRA (2015), the “following efforts for teacher recruitment were included: (a) the Pro-Team Program, a course and club that familiarized seventh and eighth grade students to the idea of a teaching career; (b) the Teacher Cadet Program, an introduction-to-teaching class that twelfth graders could take for college credit; (c) the Teaching Assistant Program, a program that allowed students to work one-on-one with teachers in critical shortage areas; (d) the Teacher Job Bank; (e) the EXPO for Teacher Recruitment; and (f) two scholarship programs for prospective teachers.”

**Teacher retention in the I-95 corridor.** The aforementioned incentives had the potential to attract and retain teachers that would permanently stay in the school districts. The ultimate goal was to keep teachers in the classrooms to educate children at a high level of rigor and to graduate students who would be successful and prepared for the workforce of the 21st century. Gov. Haley’s goals were to offer teacher incentives that would encourage retention in the school districts, successful education of students, and an end to the *Corridor of Shame.*

In South Carolina and other states in the United States, evidence shows an increasing number of students living in poverty. The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (2007) reported “that the percentage of South Carolina's schools considered in
high poverty, serving more than 70% of children living in poverty, increased from 48% in 2004 to 53% in 2007.” Evidence has also shown that schools in rural areas of South Carolina are considered in extreme poverty with 90% of students utilizing free and reduced lunches. According to United States House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, the “I-95 corridor has long been home to families haunted by decades of poverty, unemployment, and low academic and literacy rates” (Hardy, 2012). Citizens who lived along this corridor, the most undeveloped stretches of the interstate system, sought “decent jobs, safe drinking water, accessible health care, affordable housing, and an adequate educational system” (Hardy, 2012, p. 1). Poverty affected the health and wellness of children because it affected the overall health and learning focus (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The challenge for South Carolina was to keep highly qualified educators. Governor Nikki Haley’s answer was in the incentives she was trying to have approved through the Rural Teaching Initiative. The incentives targeted recruiting highly qualified teachers who would be drawn to work in smaller, rural communities.

Summary

In education, the high rate of teacher turnover was expensive to the school because of the excessive time and expense. The high cost of turnover was a heavy burden on the school district as well as the effect on student achievement in the classroom (Koos, 1940, p. 34). According to Goldberg (2000), it took “eleven hires to replace a highly qualified, effective teacher” (p. 608). Teacher quality was the essence that influenced student success (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007, p.104). This raised serious distress over “teacher attrition and its effect in public schools. In particular, the most
academically prepared teachers, were more likely to leave high poverty and minority schools and the teaching profession” (Goldhaber, 2010, p. 203).

Teacher retention was an ongoing problem in rural counties in *The Corridor of Shame* as well as across the country, which has both financial and emotional costs. Teachers who began to feel isolated and experienced low levels of support from other teachers and the community would most likely stop teaching. One hope for a better outcome is the South Carolina Rural Teaching Initiative (2016) that was created by Gov. Haley in 2016 to battle the stigma of low performing districts and *The Corridor of Shame*. This initiative could significantly reduce high teacher turnover rates so that students can begin to believe in themselves and count on teachers.
Chapter III: Methodology

Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

According to Yin (2003), “qualitative research paid attention to the meaning of everyday events, not just the seldom occurrence of the events” (p. 93). Numerous frameworks were “created to assess the rigor and assess the trustworthiness of qualitative data derived from varying studies” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Researchers using this method ensured enough detail was provided so that readers could assess the validity or credibility of the work. Triangulation and convergence of the “data were important steps to analyze phenomena” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The data in this study was through an interview with targeted questions as to why teachers who chose to stay and continually persisted in a high-poverty, low-income school district in South Carolina’s Corridor of Shame. This research employed a case study design that derived from an interest in individual cases to explore “naturally occurring sources of knowledge, such as people or observations of interactions that occur in the physical space.” Adequate contextual description helped to “understand the setting or context in which the case was revealed” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Ultimately, this qualitative case study approach was the strategy that most successfully expounded upon the daily occurrences of the participants in this study.

The rationalization behind the structure of this study followed Creswell’s (1998) four reasons for employing a qualitative research approach:

1. To answer research questions that will begin with how and why.

2. To recognize a topic that needs to be examined.

3. To present a detailed view in order to present a problem.
4. To study subjects in their *natural settings*.

Yin (2003) stated that interviews in a case study could be created as a formal survey, if deemed necessary. Following Knauer’s (2015) research process and data collection, this study utilized an in-person interview format and document research to collect data. The study utilized multiple, complex data sources that converged as well as revealed a clear picture of the teacher persistence phenomena at the school being studied.

It was important to consider how data intersected and what it revealed upon completion of the collection phase. This strategy supported the belief in case study theory that suggested observable facts could be viewed and explored from numerous personal experiences (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989). The intersection of multiple perspectives of study and research documentation showed that independent influences worked together to create the phenomenon being studied.

**Site and Participants**

This case study examined the teacher retention problem at schools statistically similar to the high-poverty, low-income Title I, high school chosen for this study. The school was in a *Corridor of Shame* school district in South Carolina. The study was conducted with current teachers who had persisted five or more years and who were willing to participate in the study. The school was a small, rural, rated excellent (1A) school with roughly 469 students in a district with approximately 1,275 students. Prior to 2009, the school was labeled at-risk under the absolute rating and growth rating. With a school that received the *at-risk* label, students were eligible to transfer to surrounding schools with a higher absolute rating. The school poverty level was over 90% in 2015.
These figures were based on students participating in Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF, who were homeless, lived in foster homes, or were migrant students. Despite these circumstances, the school made significant growth, especially in the area of teacher retention since 2008. In 2014, according to the South Carolina Department of Education, North Beacon school district was the only district of eighteen schools across the state to receive an excellent rating. Teacher attendance in 2012 was 98.3% and teacher retention was over 90% during the time of the study interviews. The school district was ranked 16th of 84 school districts in South Carolina by the South Carolina Department of Education and 23rd of 84 school districts by Federal Accountability laws (Annual School Report Card, 2015). The selected high school was chosen for the study because of its increase in teacher retention from 2008 to 2014, an accomplishment arguably worth more in-depth study.

Prior to data collection, teachers, school administrators, and district administrators received a recruitment letter asking if they would like to participate in the study. After selecting participants and distributing consent forms, all voluntary participants were asked different questions. The first three questions in the interview addressed basic demographic information about the participants’ age, gender, and ethnicity. This study focused on the teacher retention problem because of its significant impact on teachers and students who remained in the school environment.
Research Question

The overarching research question for this case study was as follows: *How has this high poverty, low-income, Title I school environment increased teacher retention and reduced high teacher attrition rates, as perceived by teachers who choose to persist?*

The primary question was the overarching topic of the study as a whole. It related to human capital theory and aligned with Maslach and Jackson (1981) and Leiter’s (1997) combined theoretical contributions to teacher burnout theory. This study investigated teacher perceptions as they made the important decision to stay in a particular school district, find a new job in a different school district, or leave classroom teaching all together. The goal of increasing the teacher retention rate required better understanding of faculty perceptions regarding why they chose to leave or stay.

Data Collection

According to Springer, (2007) illustrating the “possible complex use in data collection units and their levels was an important part of designing and conducting an effective research study.” The selection of these units sought to “obtain the broadest range of information and perspectives on the subject of study” (p. 108). These units offered varying viewpoints. For instance, sharing data with participants increased the validity of a study by gaining feedback and reinforcing the collaborative and ethical relationships with participants (p. 115). The data needed to not only support the problems of practice but also offer varying viewpoints that enriched its sources. Studying the phenomena of teacher retention depended upon the relationship between the researcher, participant, and research topic.
The researcher had a guided framework of interview questions to ask each individual in the interview setting. The setting was either in the school conference room or in the administrator’s office. The specific verbalized questions posed to each participant were different according to the interviewee, setting of the interview, and participant’s experiences. As a suggested procedure, this interviewer created a conversational atmosphere, and the interview “led to a connection of two professionals, who both had care and concern for student success” (Yin, 2003, p. 347). The result was that the interviews required focused listening and a non-judgmental attitude; therefore, bias would not be created in the interview environment” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 17). Listening was “to hear beyond the information and focus on the truthful meaning of what the interviewees were talking about when doing case study interviews” (p. 7) A researcher should attempt to understand participants’ worlds, the deeper meanings of the participants’ statements, and actions.” The interview protocol contained having a “guided conversation” with the interviewee and questions that would guide the interview (p. 145).

The study took two full school days at North Beacon High School. Each interview lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes. The sessions were scheduled around the participant’s daily work schedules. The researcher had prepared case study questions for the principal, assistant principal, and five teachers. The questions focused on teacher persistence and why the teachers chose to persist in the school. Each session allowed time for discussions about increasing teacher retention in other school districts with similar student populations but higher teacher attrition rates.

The interview tool had nine questions. The first four questions on the interview tool dealt with the professional background and teacher experiences at the school. The
next few questions asked the interviewee about the strengths and weaknesses of the school environment, especially prior to 2010. The final questions centered on the interviewee’s perceptions on teacher retention strategies and how the strategies may work at other schools.

**Data Analysis**

Jane and Zubin (2015) found that data analysis was the most successful “process of probing and putting together information that was collected, to increase the researcher’s interpretation of research evidence.” It also allowed the researcher to present the information that had been discovered to others. Researchers could both search for common threads and generalize what was found in one environment to other environments. Analysis entailed working with data, organizing the data, breaking the information into adaptable units, fusing the information, observing patterns in the research, and finding meaning in the information gathered from the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative analysis involved a number of research strategies, such as interview transcript, field notes, video, audio recordings, and documents. For the purpose of this research study, data examination was the process of connecting and reviewing data with the intent to extract useful information, build on conclusions, and apply the outcomes to other situations. Data analysis included the “range of processes and procedures that moved from the qualitative data that had been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations investigated. The idea was to examine the meaningful and transferable content of qualitative data” (Gibbs, 2002). The data analysis process commonly involved writing and identification of themes, which were important to the overall study.
Data coding served as a tool to assist with developing themes and patterns for the data collected. Coding the data included doing an in-depth search for things that were pertinent to answering the research question (Angen, 2000). The explicitness of the research question informed the researcher of what information was needed during the coding procedure. Exact questions about the outcomes of the data analysis drove the researcher into locating the specific information that needed to be coded and included in the data analysis process. Qualitative data coding entailed discovery of themes in precise statements (Angen, 2000). Themes included daily teaching experiences, responses to possible problems in the school environment, and the participant’s reflections on working daily in the study environment. Participants expressed their ideas and reflections in a variety of ways. The qualitative data coding process required that the coder read precisely and grasped the various meanings of each participant, listen to the different experiences of each participant, and identify similar coded responses across all participants (Merriam, 2009).

The coding process for this study included grouping together parallel responses in an attempt to recognize patterns that were uncovered during the interviewing process. The researcher utilized two major steps to code the data for this qualitative analysis. The first step was text segmentation. The text segmentation step entailed splitting the text into manageable fragments of information. The creation of the set of codes that was used was an a priori task, based on what the participants revealed during the interview process. The data was coded for theme and pattern. The data was also processed and used to generalize this study to other similar educational environments.
Generalizing in qualitative research situations has often been questioned as a valid study approach (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000). If the findings were generalized to other studies and other situations, then the data gleaned from qualitative studies had to be precise and authentic. This researcher’s findings had the potential to be generalized to schools in similar economic situations in South Carolina and throughout the United States. Generalizing the data to other schools required “a claim that required researchers to connect the study’s results could possibly inform and possibly change accepted ideas about school environments” (Yin, 2009, p. 43). The second step involved was generalizing the same questions and experiences to different environments where the information may be useful.

**Validity and Credibility**

A legitimate study correctly gathers data and deciphers it exactly. Yardley (2009) highlighted the issues of validity by referring to “the veracity and truthfulness of descriptive data within a study” (p. 240). To ensure veracity of the data gathered, the researcher documented each answer, kept reviewing data throughout the study, and held a data audit for the reliability of the data. The results allowed the researcher to make impartial decisions about the possibility for prejudice or partiality with results collected from the study.

Bogdon and Biklen (1998) asserted that qualitative researchers were concerned with accuracy of their data (p. 395). Qualitative researchers viewed reliability as having a strong connection between the data and the reality of the study environment. Validity and reliability measures involved “establishing that the findings of qualitative case study
research were credible and had the support of the participants of the study” (Boe, 2006, p. 135).

**Protection of Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations**

All participants were guaranteed a high level of protection in this study. To warrant this safeguard, the researcher created a consent form for the questionnaire participants and an official signed consent form for the interview participants. The questionnaire and interview portion of the study was based on Knauer’s (2015) research tool to gather information about participants’ background, teaching experience, classroom experience, and realities of teaching every day in a high-poverty, low-income school. The questioning tools focused on the everyday lived realities of the individuals in order to collect details as to why teachers left or chose to stay in their same job assignments. Northeastern University’s Internal Review Board approved the questionnaire and interview tools before any research on the chosen topic began. Participants who chose to take part in this study had the option to excuse themselves from the process at any time. Individuals who chose to interview for the research study were assured that their names and responses would always be completely anonymous.

**Summary**

The problem of practice and participants were identified and data analyzed for successful data collection. Interviews provided more in-depth information on the state of teacher retention in the school and how retention was connected to the problem of practice in this study. The researcher identified ways in which the study could inform future strategies for increasing teacher retention.
Chapter IV: Findings

Study Context

North Beacon High School stood out from other schools that were statistically similar in the same Corridor of Shame area of South Carolina along Interstate 95. North Beacon was an anomaly because most schools in this part of South Carolina were Failing on the State Report Card or at the point of being taken over by the State Department of Education because of continually low performance scores. Wilson (2013) noted, “North Beacon High School’s district was rated the worst school district in South Carolina in 1974” (pg. 8). Later, according to the South Carolina Report Card for 2005, North Beacon High School was rated as At-Risk for both the Absolute Rating and the Growth Rating. Between 2008 and 2014, the school began to show growth in state report card ratings and teacher retention. Based on the South Carolina Department of Education State Report Cards, teacher retention went from 79% in 2008 to 90% in 2014, according to the South Carolina Department of Education Report Card for 2014. Prior to 2010, high teacher attrition rates affected the school report card, enrollment, administration, and the community. Studying the statistical increase in teacher retention at North Beacon High School from 2008-2014 could aid statistically similar schools.

Interview Participants

Mrs. Hamilton- Former Principal. When Mrs. Hamilton first came to the school, there was an atmosphere of negativity that had to be overcome with the students, faculty, and staff. According to Mrs. Johnson, “the prior principal was hands off in the way she ran the school and there was no accountability for anyone.” Under that principal’s supervision, North Beacon struggled just to exist on a day to day basis. Mrs.
Hamilton became the principal of the school when it was one of the lowest performing schools in the South Carolina. If some kind of change did not take place, the school would eventually be taken over and run by the state. Mrs. Hamilton was the principal and Mrs. Johnson, the current administrator who was a guidance counselor at the time, formed a dynamic duo determined to be agents of change.

Mrs. Hamilton focused on building pride in the school. Over the next few years the process of change was difficult, but the ability to see small areas of change became evident over time. When Mrs. Hamilton became terminally ill and had to retire, she asked Mrs. Johnson to interview to become the next principal.

Mrs. Johnson- Current Principal. After moving into the principalship, Mrs. Johnson continued the work that Mrs. Hamilton began. She began with a tremendous focus on data and performance. She realized that one area that was very weak was involving students in the academic performance aspects of the school as a whole. She began by recruiting students to be on an advisory team. The students on this team would be the voice of the student population in the school. Mrs. Johnson also encouraged teachers to work with students and show them how data from the state report card affected the school. As a result, students became more involved in their own work. They began to realize the importance of the data and what it meant. Having students track their own performance data and the school’s performance data allowed them to take more ownership of their learning and the school’s success or failure. Teachers taught the students how to track their data from standardized tests; in effect, teaching students to be independently responsible for their own learning.
One important aspect of the school environment for Mrs. Johnson was cultivating the culture of family. Mrs. Johnson spent time building relationships with teachers, students, and staff. She encouraged everyone to work together as a team and for the benefit of the school. After developing a clear vision of where she wanted the school to go, Mrs. Johnson provided teachers with intensive professional development to teach them how to effectively interact with students who live in poverty. Poverty is one of the potential issues affecting the success of the school and its students. The training was the basis for providing students with a supportive, safe environment where they would have the opportunity to succeed. Mrs. Johnson believed that if students felt safe and supported, then the idea of a “strong school family” would seem a little more real to them.

**Mrs. Rivers.** Mrs. Rivers’ experience as a Calhoun County High School Teacher was always positive and uplifting. She was in the same school during the whole course of her eighteen-year career. During that time, not everything was easy, but she said that “we worked through it and fought through it together.” The first principal that came in early on in Mrs. Rivers’ career was positive and, under his leadership, she had several positive experiences. She talked about how willing to listen to ideas he was as an administrative leader. After listening to the ideas, he encouraged individuals to implement the ideas. As long as they were trying to move forward and make progress, he was very agreeable. He didn’t want them to always be stuck in the same hole of failure and not be able to climb out of it.

After that principal left, a new principal who was very close to the superintendent came into the school. The principal and the superintendent had a nepotism relationship. Mrs. Rivers’ talked about the *laissez faire* attitude the principal had toward the school.
She used an example of how the principal would come in during the mornings and leave at lunch, leaving the teachers to run the school. The school had absolutely no structure and the kids acted however they wanted because they knew there would be no consequences. Under her leadership, teachers had to make decisions that should have been made by the person in leadership. Things were less purpose driven. Mrs. Rivers stated that the environment was like “being out in the middle of the ocean and dog paddling to try and find dry land.” There was not any intrinsic or extrinsic motivation to do more. There were so many complaints from parents, faculty, and community that the principal was moved to another position in the district.

Mrs. Hamilton came in and for all the teachers it was a different world to have someone in leadership actually show care and concern for their ideas and suggestions. According to Mrs. Rivers, Mrs. Hamilton was instrumental in bringing the school from nearing the bottom rung to higher up on the ladder of education. After Mrs. Hamilton’s illness would not allow her to continue, Mrs. Johnson came into the position of leadership and kept the progress moving forward. The primary strength in this school environment was its tightly, knit community. Teachers were committed despite all of the external factors. They stuck it out together and focused on bettering themselves as much as they could. Teachers in the school felt that they had a voice and it was heard. Mrs. Rivers enjoyed having enough autonomy over her classroom that she could do what she needed to do without fearing backlash from anyone. She talked about the many opportunities that she would not get anywhere else. She said they also paid attention to things she was proficient in. She explained that she would lose all of the things she had gained if she went to another district. Mrs. Rivers said, “We, as teachers, have to have a desire to do
what we do. People stay here because no one is going to harass you or micro-manage you. People treat you in a humane fashion here.” She went further to explain that the bar has been set and there should not be someone having to watch over teachers every five minutes. In her opinion, other teachers stayed because they were able to create a niche and be comfortable where they chose to stay.

The primary weakness in this school environment, according to Mrs. Rivers, involved the lack of focus and direction prior to the two new principals. There was also a lack of focus between the standards and the curriculum. Another issue was the lack of focus and direction with goal setting and direct focus.

Mrs. Rivers felt strongly that administration should create a condition where teachers desire to be invested in. She stated, “No one wants to be put down, but those types of numbers-only driven school districts are so focused on test scores that they beat the teachers’ down.” She felt that administrators and people in leadership just shouldn’t beat the people up mentally who are working for them.

Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith has spent twenty of his twenty-two years teaching Economics and Government at North Beacon High School. He stayed at the school for so long because it was a good working environment in a supportive school district. There was a strong administrative support in the school. The dynamics of the school changed since he began in 1994. He appreciated the fact that there was student accountability. The focus was on the students rather than other issues. Teaching the students to look at the data allowed them to be more knowledgeable of how their performance affected their grades and the school as a whole. The focus of the school as a whole was on helping
students be successful. The advantages the school offered that made teachers want to stay were based on the family environment and the concern from the administrators.

Over the years, Mr. Smith pointed out that teachers’ left to pursue other teaching opportunities in bigger school districts. He felt North Beacon was at a disadvantage of being in a rural school district close to more heavily populated city. Some teachers left the school to go to a bigger school district for more money. Other people moved to get closer to where they lived for better teaching opportunities. As far as incentives to stay in the district, he surmised that at the heart of it is the positive way teachers are treated. He thought the teacher pay was lower than the average, but the supportive school environment made up for the difference. Education was funded locally and the tax base for rural districts was not very high. Mr. Smith stated, “If you are teaching in an underperforming school and pressure is put on the teacher as far as accountability and testing, there is going to be a low-threshold for a safe, student environment in a school only focused on testing.” Being compared to other school districts where monetary and educational sources are higher was never fair to the struggling teachers who were doing their best to teach proper content to students. It also wasn’t fair to students who have educational challenges put in front of them every day. Most people entered into teaching because they liked to teach and the unfairness made some teachers leave the profession.

**Mr. Nair.** Mr. Nair came from India in 2006 on a three-year visa. He came to North Beacon to be a math teacher. He was hired by the former principal, Mrs. Hamilton. After being at North Beacon for three years, other teachers usually went back home to India, but he decided to stay because the school district had invested three years into him and wanted him to stay. He was the Math Department Chair and the 2014 School District
Teacher of the Year. He wanted to stay in America and be part of the school family at North Beacon. He described the climate of North Beacon as being a “small family.” He never felt like he was from the outside. He stayed because he felt that he was part of a family. Mr. Nair identified an important strength of the school as having a culture of family. To him, everyone knew everyone, and each individual played a part in the family. Most importantly, the students were part of the family atmosphere. Everyone was tied to each other through relationships, day to day issues, and a supportive environment. Mr. Nair focused on the supportive environment in the school not just for students, but for teachers as well. He affirmed the fact that Mrs. Johnson was very supportive of her teachers and was always available in a time of need.

Mrs. Logan. As a veteran teacher from another struggling school district, Mrs. Logan had a very clear distinction in between the school environment at North Beacon and other statistically similar schools. Mrs. Logan taught school in another low performing school district in South Carolina for 15 years. For Mrs. Logan, working at North Beacon was like existing “in a different universe.” Mrs. Logan recounted her experience of working in a statistically similar school, but with many more problems. The school where she worked had a high drop-out rate with more young people leaving the school every year. Parents were pulling their children out of the community school and choosing to put them into a new charter school that was being built on the other side of the district. Coming into North Beacon was like a “culture shock” for Mrs. Logan. She stated, “I have never been in a school where the family environment has been so genuine. It’s not just with teachers, but it’s with teachers, administration, and students. It’s basically everyone working in the school. We all look out for each other.”
Adjusting to a new environment where staff development was chosen by the teachers was also something Mrs. Logan did not expect. She admitted not knowing what to expect coming into a high school environment like North Beacon High School. Overall, she enjoyed her time there and plans on staying for a very long time.

**Mrs. Watson.** The first year at North Beacon was challenging for Mrs. Watson. Coming in as a new teacher who was a former student, Mrs. Watson was not taken seriously by the teachers who were already in leadership. The teachers still thought she was a child instead of a professional. Before she began teaching, she did much in-depth research to prepare herself for the first year. She said, “The teachers who were here told me they would help me, but they basically left me on my own to figure everything out.” After eighteen years, Mrs. Watson feels she has put down roots and feels like North Beacon is a home to her with a built-in family.

Coming into the school as a new teacher was a scary prospect for her, but she learned that relationships between administration, teachers, and students had to be copasetic in order for the school to run successfully. In her opinion, there had to be parent buy-in, student buy-in, and teacher buy-in for new, progressive ideas to be successful. One of the main struggles they faced once Mrs. Hamilton and Mrs. Johnson came in was encouraging teachers who had been teaching for the same way for thirty years to change and update their teaching methods. They had to work together to encourage this change. Mrs. Watson stated,

We are the only high school in our district and we are looked as being high poverty and low [performing]. Looking at teachers that have been here 30 years, we had to encourage them to change. Teachers slowly got on board. It’s been a
struggle, but things have been looking up. People can’t believe that we are high poverty and our test scores are so high. It was a lot of hard work and having the kids buy in as well. Kids are given their scores and we let them see the data. They understood why they needed to score what they did.

The most important thing that seemed to work for this school environment for the parent, student, teacher, and administration buy-in was to acknowledge the changes that took place. Students took personal responsibility of their own work and asked about EOC percentages. They would track past EOC scores to their own EOC scores, so they knew where they would stand by the end of the year.

Before Mrs. Hamilton started as principal, the teachers had to run the school, make decisions, and plan everything that went on. The principal would come in and leave. She never stopped to be there for the faculty. Even though she was at the school, she wasn’t there for the teachers. Before Mrs. Hamilton’s arrival, teachers had to run the school, the principal would come in and leave. When Mrs. Hamilton came on board, it was understood that she was a task master, but that would be okay because felt that she knew Mrs. Watson would get the job done. The resulting change in leadership was a huge difference from Mrs. Watson’s point-of-view. She was a taskmaster who challenged the teachers to be more than what they thought they could be. The teachers wanted someone to push them, so that they could be better instead of what the community thought they were. They became a High Schools That Work site. Under Mrs. Hamilton’s leadership, the school culture and environment began to improve. The same continued with Mrs. Johnson when she came into leadership and continued Mrs. Hamilton’s hard work.
The school environment was completely different. According to Mrs. Watson, “The kids are in sync with the teachers. The kids feel comfortable at the school and it is a safe haven for them. Even when we have teacher work days the kids are here. It is like a small family. The teachers see kids more than the parents do. The kids develop confidence and comfort.” The key was strong leadership in the school and rapport with the students and teachers. This was the key to the high level of retention for teachers at North Beacon High School. Another reason for retention was the supportive relationship that existed between the faculty and administration. Teacher incentives primarily centered around getting small bonuses at Christmas if the budget allowed for it. The superintendent or principal also gave small gifts to show appreciation for the work that teachers did on a daily basis.

The people in North Beacon used to call the students the “Country Clowns.” After many struggles, the school made many strides toward improvement. The faculty and administration worked hard to change the perception of the kids. During the lowest moments, the poverty rate was very high, the school couldn’t keep teachers or principals, the kids were so low academically and the teachers did not know how to pull the students up. Teacher frustration and discipline problems kept teacher attrition rates up. Mrs. Watson made a very relevant statement about the state of teachers and retention. She said, “I’m in not for the income, but for the outcome. It’s not about you, it’s about the kids. It’s not like they have someone at home to push them.” Mrs. Watson explained further: “If the morale of the teachers is low and principals don’t do anything about it, teachers will walk. When the leadership is in place that listens instead of telling us what to do, it helps.” She felt that teachers needed to be heard.
Discussion of Findings

Overall, the participants described a professional experience that was maintained by a purposeful, support system that was put in place at the school. The findings that emerged in the interview data regarding teacher retention in this particular school included the following: positive, necessary cultural change resulting from large reforms brought about by recent administrations, an administrative increase in teacher and student support, the current positive working and educational environment, the presence of positive relationships, and social cohesiveness. These emergent themes gleaned from the teacher and principal interviews, as well as findings related to the theoretical framework, identifies six clear strategies for improving teacher retention:

- Necessary cultural change improved retention
- Strong administrative/teacher rapport improved retention
- A strong, positive environment improved retention
- Strong relationships and social cohesiveness improved retention
- Strong school community improved retention
- Monitoring and focusing on student success increased teacher retention

Necessary cultural change improved retention. The first theme that emerged from the qualitative data was the school’s recent cultural change as a factor behind the high retention rate. This cultural change largely stemmed from the change in administration. A crucial aspect of the cultural change in the school was simply the ability for change to happen in the first place. Multiple participants noted how teachers who have been teaching for decades have the tendency to get set in their ways and are
resistant to change. While making teachers amenable to change took some time, they started to believe that change was necessary for their students to be more successful.

Prior to the cultural shift, the teachers essentially had to run the school because the principal was not visible much of the time, frequently only showing up for a several hours at a time. The principal at this time was related to the superintendent and nepotism was taking place. This produced poor rapport between the principal and the teachers. More than one participant said the prior principal was physically present only some of the time. It felt like she wasn’t there for the teachers, and with nobody to rely on, teachers had to be the leaders within the school instead. As a whole, all teachers were welcoming change by the time this particular principal was replaced.

Part of the cultural change that took place also consisted of change in the learning environment. The two recent administrations implemented new programs, including a 30-minute period for reading at the end of the day that has been implemented throughout the school. The school also began using Achieve 3000 and implemented a career program on Wednesdays for college and careers. Additionally, extra help from teachers on Thursdays and Fridays gave students the opportunity to make up work. This allowed students to improve their own education and grades.

Three participants noted that the principal had “an open-door policy,” whereas most principals require an appointment. These participants stated that in times of difficulty, they simply walked into the office and stated to the principal that they “needed to speak privately.” The individuals said she sits, listens and gives the advice that you need or need to hear at that moment.
This cultural change also included the ability for teachers to have a stronger voice within the school on topics such as staff development. Before the cultural/administrative change, the principal would just tell teachers what kind of staff development they needed and what was expected. After the cultural shift, the new administration would make efforts to include teacher preferences into the type of staff development being planned. The administration asked for feedback from its teachers and the differences has been evident in the environment itself.

**Strong administrative/teacher rapport improved retention.** The working environment in the school was a big game changer when it came to making the decision to stay or go. All participants interviewed agreed the working environment was a “proper balance between support and independence.” The teachers were given the autonomy to do what they wanted in the classroom as long as they followed standards and protocols set forth by the state, district, and administration.

The morale in the school in more than one interview was described as a “cyclical relationship between administration, teachers, and students.” The presence of high morale in the school, “helped teachers get through the day,” and data from multiple participants’ suggested that the presence of this rapport with administration and students helped to improve teacher satisfaction and motivation. Teachers also noted the rapport among staff and faculty members.

Multiple participants stated that the current administration was different from others. One participant described the earlier (pre-Mrs. Hamilton) school culture as a place “where you come to work, they don’t say anything to you, you do whatever they say and it’s almost like they are cracking the whip on you, and I’m like what am I here for, you
give me no appreciation.” Instead, the current administration went to great lengths to let teachers know that they were appreciated for their work. Multiple respondents mentioned appreciation as a motivating factor for staying in the educational environment.

This fact also improved the working environment within this school. Another participant statement related to the positive working environment present within the school: “But I think it’s more so the heart of the school. How much we care for our kids.” The ability to grow as teachers within the work environment was important, “… academic, professional, as well as emotional support was provided to teachers.” Overall, respondents were very satisfied with this school as a place to work.

Along with a stronger focus on performance and data, the previous principal and her successor started building school pride and using the administration to support teachers. In all interviews, there was an obvious level of satisfaction with the current administration. The satisfaction came from being supported by the administration as well as having a principal who was willing to listen if there was an issue. The participants concurred that teachers on campus, “know that if there is an issue, that administration is immediately going to enter into the picture in order to help teachers handle the situation and support them.”

This new culture of support permeated beyond the principal. The “assistant principal, the curriculum coordinator, and members of student services discuss topics relating to support in executive leadership meetings.” In the new school culture, teachers and administration were viewed as a team—teachers never even meet parents by themselves but were instead always accompanied by an administrator or a member of the guidance department. All teachers lauded the performance of the current and prior
principal for the school’s success. These experiences clearly illustrate how strong leadership clearly contributed to the high teacher retention rate.

**A strong, positive environment improved retention.** A positive school culture and working environment go hand in hand. Participants felt that the principal’s job was to support teachers “in any way.” This participant went on to say that support from the principal also helped teachers to improve their skills. This support also included meetings with students’ parents: teachers never met with parents by themselves, and that there would always be an administrator or guidance counselor in the room with them. Strong support extended to the district office as well as the community at large, and the administration served as a force of strong leadership within the school. The current principal’s “open door” policy was mentioned more than once. The principal provided a place where the teachers concerns could be heard without fear of judgment or retaliation.

**Strong relationships and social cohesiveness improve retention.** Participants stated that the school staff worked very hard over the past few years to develop solid relationships between teachers, students, and administration. Two participants stated, “the relationships are important in the practice of teaching and in order to understand who the children are and where they are coming from.” The faculty and staff have performed excellently in building these relationships. Another teacher participant shared that the school “feels like a family environment and is one of the reasons why they have stayed at this particular school.” The change in the school began with leadership and has become a cyclical system of support, accountability, and success. All respondents agreed that going through a change was not easy, but the programs and other ideas implemented by the former and current principal have been game changers for teachers who decided to leave
the school. For them, having the needed accountability and autonomy in the classroom is a definite selling point on why they choose to stay at North Beacon High School.

**Strong school community improved retention.** The involvement in the community was also a factor behind high teacher retention. Teachers were invested in the community regardless of whether they lived in the community or not. Participants concurred that the community was an important part of the success of their students. More than one teacher commented that they felt like they are part of the community, and that being a community was one of the most important strengths that they have.

The principal that initiated the “culture of change” to build a strong school community instituted a strong focus on data and performance with input from the students. The current principal continued the vision for change that began with the aims and goals of the earlier principal. This contrasted sharply with the lack of focus and direction that was cited as a hallmark of previous administrations. The last principal implemented new staff developments and introduced the teachers to the environments of other high schools. Teachers could go to conferences and bring back new teaching methods to their school. They could also see what other schools were doing all over the country and generate ideas to help their students to compete on the national level.

The previous principal instituted specific goal-setting among teachers. She also started setting expectations for teachers, which one participant stated had a “trickle-down” effect as to the fact that teachers would then set expectations for their students. The last two principals started providing important feedback to teachers and started performing random observations in teachers’ classrooms. This helped teachers to improve their performance and increase their job satisfaction. These types of changes
made by the previous principal and continued by the current principal marked a “huge turnaround” that helped to motivate the teachers to do the best job they were able to do, which in turn helped the students to be successful.

Monitoring and focusing on student success increased retention. The interviews revealed that teachers’ close monitoring was seen as a force for positive change. With teachers, there was a definite “focus on the data along with developing plans for students based on how they stand with respect to test data.” More than one interviewee identified the importance of developing plans for over age kids in order to help them get on track for graduation, meeting with their parents, and explaining to them that their ultimate goal was for the child to graduate and advance to the next level. This focus on the data allowed the school to better serve its special needs students.

More than one teacher mentioned the focus on students allowed all involved stakeholders to use data in order to help all students academically. Interviewees also noted after-school programs and time at the end of the day where students could get remedial help. As one participant noted, when the level of achievement “increases at the school, it makes everyone proud.

Summary

This chapter discussed the themes that emerged in the qualitative data about teacher retention in North Beacon High School. The themes found within these data consisted of the following causes of teacher retention: a necessary cultural change; the strong administrative/teacher rapport; positive environment; strong relationships and social cohesiveness; strong school community; and monitoring and focusing on student success.
At North Beacon High School, cultural change brought in by the recent administrations and the associated increase in support for teachers and students appeared to have the most significant influence on teacher retention. Based on interview responses, these changes also created a positive change in the school’s working environment. The factors of positive supportive relationships, social cohesiveness, and focus on student success were also important factors in teacher retention. Additionally, the high retention rate attracted teachers and encouraged them to stay. An understanding of educators’ perceptions and the reasons why they chose to stay in a residential school context could help school leaders implement ways to better support and retain teachers in a high turnover environment.
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

Review of the Problem of Practice

Some school districts in South Carolina experienced difficulty in hiring and retaining highly qualified teachers, in part because of their geographic location (Garrett, 2015). Additionally, graduation rates in teacher certification programs were declining; this combined with the number of veteran teachers leaving the profession, made for an eventual statewide shortage (Garrett, 2015). Research suggested that funding disparities also contributed to difficulty retaining teachers in some districts (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Funding disparities were evident in many South Carolina counties, but particularly in the I-95 rural school districts. In the state of South Carolina, each county’s tax base was figured on the industrial tax base of each county. Some counties had a higher amount of companies and tourism to make up a good tax base, but most small, rural school districts did not. The result was that teacher pay was lower and the opportunity for access to technology and higher-level learning opportunities was limited. There was hardly any access to the instruments needed to enhance deeper levels of learning. As a result, there was usually a high teacher attrition rate in these school districts.

This study was an in-depth investigation of teacher retention in a high-poverty, Title I school in rural, South Carolina. It examined the factors that teachers consider when deciding whether to remain in these schools. Understanding teachers’ reasons for staying as opposed to leaving is particularly important because high teacher attrition rates disrupt a school’s continuity and planning. It also negatively affected student learning and increased the school district’s hiring and recruitment expenditures (Geiger, 1995). These disruptions and extra expenses limit a school’s ability to provide quality
educational opportunities for its students (Geiger, 1995). In spite of these effects, few studies focused on teacher retention and on the effects of attrition in same schools. This study aimed to show that schools in this area of South Carolina could succeed with the right mix of leadership, teacher dedication, and community support.

**Review of Methodology**

This study used interviews with targeted questions in order to gather data about why teachers who stay at a statistically low-rate turnover school have chosen to do so. The sample for the study consisted of teachers who have stayed at the school for five years or more. A case study design was chosen in order to focus on exploring naturally occurring sources of knowledge. This study used a qualitative approach, following Creswell’s (1998) four reasons for qualitative research:

- to answer research questions that begin with “how” and “why”
- to recognize a topic that needs to be examined
- to present a detailed view of a problem
- to study subjects in their natural settings

This study followed Knauer’s (2015) data collection by using an in-person interview format and document research to collect data. The data sources for this study converged to show a clear picture of teacher persistence at the school studied.

**Discussion of the Major Findings**

The major findings of the study focused on how the teachers and administrators in this environment perceived the school’s high retention rate. The interview data revealed the following identified strategies for improving retention: a necessary cultural change; the strong administrative/teacher rapport; positive environment; strong relationships and
social cohesiveness; strong school community; and monitoring and focusing on student success.

**Necessary cultural change improved retention.** The theme of cultural change was particularly important. It was used to describe the shift in the school’s climate and culture brought about by the two most recent administrations. Cultural change overlapped administrative support and working environments. The literature showed that retaining highly qualified teachers requires commitment from both building leaders and teachers. The best way to improve a problem is to look at it honestly, put aside differences, and work together for the ultimate goal of higher student achievement and engagement.

Teachers talked in-depth about the strong administrative/teacher bonds as a reason behind the high retention in this particular school. The AFT (2016) found that in order for teachers to be happy at work, principals should “clearly communicate high expectations, create a school culture that promotes mutual respect, and makes teachers feel supported” (p. 17). Principals who fail to create this kind of school environment will not retain the best teachers. Strong administrative support/teacher rapport is a very important aspect of a successful school culture.

**Positive environment improved retention.** The literature showed the importance of creating a positive environment as an action of necessity. Individuals who desire to create a positive environment in a school culture must be willing to listen and make changes when needed. Teachers at North Beacon were adamant that the positive environment in the school was an easy fix. It took at least four to five years for the school to have the environment it does today.
**Strong relationships and social cohesiveness improved retention.** Strong relationships and social cohesiveness among teachers, principals, and students was a strong indicator for the success or failure of the school environment. The reason for the strong cohesiveness at North Beacon High School is the dedication and accountability of students, teachers, and the administration.

Retention rates were more significant when teachers have a strong connection to the community through family ties or feeling welcomed by other members of the community (Bornfeld, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997). At North Beacon High School, each person interviewed had a sense of pride and community about their school.

Monitoring and focusing on student success was mentioned as an important focus with respect to the current and previous administration along with a stronger focus on the students and their performance. The high retention rate in and of itself is also mentioned as an important attractor with respect to the strong family environment evident in this school setting. Having an administration willing to listen and work with every agent of change involved is a key to increasing teacher retention.

**Findings Related to the Theoretical Framework**

In this study, Maslach and Jackson’s (1981) and Maslach and Leiter’s (1999) teacher burnout theories were used alongside the human capital theory presented by Myung, Nordstrum, and Martinez (2005). Maslach and Leiter’s (1997) burnout theory was the primary framework used to explore why teachers at high-poverty, low-income schools choose to leave the classroom. Burnout was defined as “failure to function successfully in one's job as an effect of persistent and lengthy job-related stress” (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 35). The “potential for emotional stress among teachers is high,
and it was thought that this may lead to burnout and lower retention” (Myung et. al, 2005). Teacher burnout “encompasses a number of intersecting factors: physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and cognitive weariness” (Myung et. al, 2005).

The results from this study suggest that the retention rate is low in the school partially due to the fact that teacher burnout was not identified as a problem. However, this study also incorporates a biased sample: only teachers who decided to remain at this school were selected for inclusion. These teachers asserted that teacher burnout was not a school-wide problem and is not a contributing factor to teachers leaving the school. This is likely due to all of the current positive qualities present in the school largely brought about by the present and previous administrations.

Investment in human capital is the largest investment school districts make through salary and benefits. Human capital theory combines the talents, skills, abilities, intelligence, training, judgment, and knowledge possessed by a collective grouping of educators. The results found in this study indicated a strong presence of human capital, with the administration, teachers, students, as well as the community all working symbiotically in order to produce a positive working and learning environment, as well as a school in which teachers as well as students are strongly supported. These results suggest that the presence of positive human capital within the school serves as an important factor in the high retention rate.

Findings Related to Literature Review

The results found in the present study largely support those relevant findings present within the literature review. Specifically, factors such as satisfaction and teached-rated school climate have been found to be predictors of teacher stress and burnout,
which in turn lead to high turnover (Marso & Pigge, 1996; Kukla-Avecedo, 2009). However, other factors such as gender, age, and experience were not found in the current study related to retention (Marso & Pigge, 1996).

In previous studies, salary has been a mitigating issue for teacher retention because teachers with higher salaries were more likely to keep teaching (Grissmer & Kirby, 1992; Murnane & Olson, 1989). Teachers have also made decisions to leave teaching if they face lower salaries and more stressful conditions (Dolton & Van Der Klaw, 1999; Ondrich, 2008). These results were supported in the current study. Relationships have also been found to be a factor in teacher retention (Zost, 2010), a finding that was also supported in the current study. The principal producing an environment that is conducive to teachers feeling respected and that their needs are taken into consideration also related to teacher retention (AFT, 2006), with these results being supported in the current study as well.

Significance of the Study

High teacher attrition rates carry with them a substantial set of negative effects on schools and students. This study contributed to the literature in a way that proves that students from high-poverty, low-income schools can succeed. An environment that fosters a student’s positive attitude and taking ownership of work are two key ingredients to the success of the school. There is every possibility that more students in this type of environment can succeed with a little extra work from administrators, students, and teachers all working together to make it happen. These results indicated that a number of factors were at play serving to explain this high level of retention at North Beacon High School. The pattern found within this particular school could potentially be replicated in
other schools with lower retention in order to help increase teacher retention. Similarly, these results also help to explain the presence of poor teacher retention in other schools.

**Limitations**

There were a number of limitations to this study. Since it was a qualitative study, it was not also impossible to determine causality: whether the factors discussed by the participants had any actual effect on teacher retention. Causality may be inferred or suggested in this study, but it cannot be determined on the basis of qualitative data.

Another limitation consisted of the use of a non-representative sample. This study’s sample was not representative of teachers in South Carolina or teachers in Corridor of Shame schools because it was not large enough. While any results obtained cannot be generalized to a larger population in any case due to the fact that a qualitative methodology was used as opposed to a quantitative methodology. This fact was further exacerbated through the use of a non-random sample. While in a random sample every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected for inclusion in the study, a convenience sample looks at respondents on the basis of ease for the benefit of the researcher. In the present case, a convenient sample was used, with one principal and several teachers being sampled from a single school. This represents a methodology similar to that of a case study, where generalization and external validity is not necessarily a primary goal of the study.

**Validity**

Two different types of validity exist for qualitative methodologies. External validity is the ability to generalize the results obtained in the study to some larger population (Levine & Parkinson, 2014). In the current study, the external validity would
be the ability to generalize the results to other schools in the United States. This study’s external validity was limited by the fact that it is a case study with a convenience sample. Therefore, the conclusions determined on the basis of the data analyzed for this study may or may not hold with respect to other schools.

Internal validity related to the extent to which an experimental design followed the principle of cause-and-effect (Levine & Parkinson, 2014). As discussed in the limitations section of this chapter, it was not possible to precisely determine cause and effect in this study. However, some indication of cause and effect could be gleaned from the participants’ responses to questions about why the teacher retention rate was so high in their school. The teachers’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences did provide some evidence of a relationship between the school’s higher retention rates. It also provided some indication as to the cause and effect relationship between these precursors of retention and the high retention rate found within the school itself. Therefore, especially with respect to the fact that this was a qualitative study, this study can be considered to be internally valid. These two types of validity traditionally used in order to judge validity in quantitative research. Additional criteria for “judging validity in qualitative research include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability “(Buskust & Davis, 2008).

Credibility “is the degree to which the results of a qualitative research study appear true to a participant who took part in the qualitative study” (Buskust & Davis, 2008). In this study, the researcher used a question or statement to confirm the respondents’ answers at several points during the interviews. Affirmative responses were used to indicate credibility with respect to this study. Participants could also review the
conclusions made on the basis of the qualitative data analysis alongside the transcripts of the interviews to confirm the credibility of this study.

Transferability refers to how applicable the study’s findings are to other settings (Buskust & Davis, 2008). This is also known as generalizability, and “can be enhanced by thoroughly explaining the context of the research and the assumptions that were made within the study” (Buskust & Davis, 2008). It was difficult to determine the extent to which the results of the current study were transferable to a larger population.

Dependability is the “extent to which the findings of the study would be replicated if conducted with the same participants in the same context” (Buskust & Davis, 2008). The concept of reliability within the context of quantitative research is derived from the assumption that experiments can be replicated; the same results should be obtained if observations could be taken a second time. In the current study, the aim of achieving dependability was achieved by the researcher attempting to account for changing conditions with respect to the phenomenon studied as well as changes in the design by continuing to refine her understanding of the setting (Buskust & Davis, 2008).

Confirmability asks whether a study’s data help to confirm the general findings of the study and also whether the data lead to the study’s implications (Buskust & Davis, 2008). In qualitative research, it is assumed that any particular researcher will bring a “unique perspective to the study and confirmability is determined by the degree to which others could confirm the results obtained” (Buskust & Davis, 2008). This is enhanced by having documented procedures for processing the data during the course of the study. In the current study, it is felt by the researcher that another researcher analyzing the same data would conclude with very similar results. Additionally, the researcher also was
careful in transcribing the data and checking the transcriptions for errors in order to improve the confirmability of the study (Buskust & Davis, 2008).

**Implications for Practice**

The implications for future practice, based on the study conducted at North Beacon High School, are centered on the fact that this school is the exception to the rule among South Carolina’s *Corridor of Shame* school districts. The findings that emerged in data regarding teacher retention in this particular school included the following: positive, necessary cultural change resulting from large reforms brought about by recent administrations, an administrative increase in teacher and student support, the current positive working and educational environment, the presence of positive relationships, and social cohesiveness. For other schools and school districts in the *Corridor of Shame* this study clearly shows that with the right mix of administration and teachers determined to make a necessary cultural change improvement is not only possible, but probable. The right people with an unlimited amount of fortitude significantly influence a school’s progress through necessary changes to create an environment of strong support and social cohesiveness. Individuals must be willing to stay through the difficult times to witness the end result of the dedication and persistence of the people who truly care. The strategies utilized to implement this process at North Beacon High School are transferable to any other rural school in the I-95 Corridor.

**Future Research**

The limitations discussed in an earlier section of this chapter also provide suggestions for future research. The current study’s external validity is relatively limited. Future studies that focus on other schools in the United States would help to determine
the extent to which the results found in the present study hold in these other schools. The
current study’s qualitative design makes it difficult to determine cause and effect. A
quantitative study could help to determine whether there are causal relationships between
the teachers’ opinions about the causes of high retention and the actual retention rate.
Future studies could also incorporate a random sample in order to achieve results that are
more generalizable and might allow for the inclusion of hypothesis testing. These studies
could include the development of null and alternative hypotheses.

Conclusion

High teacher attrition remains an important problem in American school districts. As discussed in Chapter II, teacher attrition produces negative repercussions, and there are remarkably few studies focusing on reasons behind teacher attrition, especially regarding schools located in the poorest areas of the country. This study examined reasons behind teacher attrition and teacher retention in order to help schools reduce teacher turnover in order to improve the educational situation in the United States. The results of this study identified a series of factors that led to high teacher retention in one particular school in South Carolina. These factors included positive cultural change, administrative support, and a positive working and learning environment, among others.
References


Ingersoll, R. & Smith, T. (2004). *Do Teacher Induction and Mentoring Matter?* Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/134](http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/134)


Marso, R., & Pigge, F. (1996). Entering personal and academic characteristics of a longitudinal sample of persisting and non-persisting teachers seven years after commencement of teacher preparation. Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, St. Louis, MO.


Appendix A: IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: December 8, 2016  IRB #: CPS16-11-02
Principal Investigator(s): Sara Ewell
                                      Donna Bryan
Department:  Doctor of Education Program  
             College of Professional Studies
Address:  20 Belvidere  
           Northeastern University
Title of Project:  Teacher Retention: A Case Study in a High Poverty, Low-Income School Environment in South Carolina’s I-95 Corridor of Shame
Participating Sites: Calhoun County High School permission in file
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: DECEMBER 7, 2017

Investigator’s Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair  
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director  
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

November 2016

Dear Teachers of Calhoun County High School,

My name is Donna Bryan, and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. As part of my thesis, I am conducting a case study on teacher retention in high-poverty, low-income schools, specifically Calhoun County High School.

I am seeking to understand why the teacher retention rate at Calhoun County High School is much higher than other statistically similar schools. In order to gather the necessary data, I am asking you to take part in my research by participating in a one-on-one interview. The purpose of this interview is to understand why teachers of high-poverty, low-income schools are leaving the classroom, incurring high teacher attrition rates, in other statistically similar school environments. I plan on examining teacher attrition and retention at Calhoun County High School and the influences that cause teachers to extend their contract such as: job satisfaction, teacher recruitment, and teacher mentoring programs. The information collected from this study may help to clearly define successful retention strategies and increase teacher retention at other statistically similar high-poverty, low-income schools, in South Carolina.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Prior to beginning the interview, you will be given a consent form that will need to be signed. The consent form will explain the process of taking part in the research. The interview will incorporate both general, non-identifiable, information along with questions pertaining to your experiences at Calhoun County High School. We will meet off campus to increase confidentiality.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Additionally, for the purpose of the research, your identity will be recorded with a number identifiable only to me (the Student Investigator) and Dr. Sara Ewell (the Principal Investigator). After the audio has been transcribed it will be destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me at bryan.d@imuky.neu.edu.

Thank you,

Donna Bryan
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies

IRB# CPS16-11-02
Approved: 12/8/16
Expiration Date: 12/7/17
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Invitation to Participate in a Case Study on Teacher Retention

Hello! We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. We are holding an informational meeting to find teachers who would be interested in sharing their experiences of working at Calhoun County High School. Teachers would need to have five or more years of classroom teaching experience to be eligible for the study. Thank you ahead of time for your interest.

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this research is to study the high level of teacher persistence in a local, rural high school. Specifically, focusing on the strengths of why teachers’ stay and suggestions persisting teachers have for other statistically similar school districts with extremely high teacher attrition rates.

Your Part in the Study:
As a participant in this study, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your teaching experiences at Calhoun County High School, particularly addressing the successes of what particular implements are in place in the school that encourage high teacher retention. We will also ask you what factors you think may cause high teacher attrition in other statistically similar school districts.

Location:
The location of the meetings will be at any location each participant chooses, off campus would help with confidentiality. The time for each session will be approximately 40 to 60 minutes. The meeting will be an interview style with specific questions being asked regarding teacher retention. The first meeting will be in January and the last meeting will be in March. The final meeting will be go over the findings of the study.

Benefit:
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the information learned from this study may help to increase teacher retention at high-poverty, low-income schools, in particular other schools in I-95 Corridor of Shame school districts. You will also receive a $10.00 Amazon gift card for your time.

Participation:
Your participation is this research study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

For more information, please contact:
Donna Bryan
bryan.d@husky.neu.edu

IRB# CPS16-11-02
Approved: 12/8/16
Expiration Date: 12/7/17
Appendix D: Unsigned Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Doctor of Education Program

Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator, Dr. Sara Ewell, Student Researcher, Donna Bryan

Title of Project: Teacher Retention: A Case Study in a High Poverty, Low-Income School Environment in South Carolina’s I-95 Corridor of Shame

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research is to study the high level of teacher retention in a local, low-income, high-poverty school in South Carolina. Specifically, focusing on the strengths of why teachers’ stay and suggestions retained teachers have for other statistically similar school districts with higher teacher attrition rates.

You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to be in this study because you are a teacher at Calhoun County High School, a high-poverty, low-income school that has a resilient, dedicated faculty who choose to persist in an I-95 Corridor of Shame school district and school environment. Calhoun County School District is neither sponsoring nor conducting this research.

Why is this research study being done?
This research study is being done to examine the reasons teachers choose to persist in a high-poverty, low-income school environment in South Carolina. The study will also seek to understand the effects of high teacher attrition in statistically similar school environments.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in an interview for questioning about your experiences at Calhoun County High School and the factors that led to you extend your contract year after year.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The interview will be at a time and place that is convenient for you and will take approximately one hour.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
The only identified risk associated with your involvement in this study is the possibility that your participation, and only your participation, could be discovered by other people. To minimize this risk, your name will not be recorded on any of the materials in this study. Instead, your identity will be recorded with a number and listed as “Teacher______”. Thus, your identity and participation in this study should not be revealed to anybody.

IRB# CPS16-11-02
Approved: 12/8/16
Expiration Date: 12/7/17
Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the information learned from this study may help to increase teacher retention at high-poverty, Title I schools, in particular other schools in I-95 Corridor of Shame school districts.

Who will see the information about me?
Your identity as a participant in this study will not be known. That means no one, other than the researcher, will know that the answers you give are from you. Your name will not be recorded on any of the materials in this study. Instead, your identity will be recorded with a number and listed as “Teacher _______”

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Donna Bryan, the student investigator, at bryan.d@husky.neu.edu. You can also contact Dr. Sara Ewell at s.ewell@neu.edu or 857.272.8948, the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
While there is no penalty for not participating, if you choose to take part in the study you will be given a $10 Amazon gift certificate at the completion of the interview process.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
No costs that may be incurred by the participant for this study.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must have taught or currently teach at Calhoun County High School.

I agree to take part in this research.

IRB# CPS16-11-02
Approved: 12/8/16
Expiration Date: 12/7/17
Signature of person agreeing to take part

Date

Printed name of person above

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

Date

Printed name of person above
Appendix E: Interview Questions

Those who are selected to participate in the interview portion of the study will be asked the following questions.

**Interviewer:**

*The purpose of this interview is to understand why teacher retention in low-income, high-poverty, Title I schools, specifically Calhoun County High School, is higher than that of other statistically similar schools in the surrounding state. The study will also explore the factors that encourage the teachers of Calhoun County High School continue to persist in a statistically similar school more often than their counterparts.*

**Questions:**

1. Tell me how long you have taught at Calhoun County High School.
2. What subject area do you teach?
3. Describe your experience at Calhoun County High School.
4. During your time at Calhoun County High School, what would you say were some of its strengths?
5. During your time at Calhoun County High School, what would you say were some of its weaknesses, especially prior to 2010?
6. During your time at Calhoun County High School, what were some of the teacher retention initiatives put into place in an effort to retain teachers?
7. Based upon your own perceptions, what factors do you believe are causing teachers to persist at Calhoun County High School?
8. Based upon your own perceptions, what factors cause high teacher attrition rates in other statistically similar school environments like Calhoun County High School?
9. Based upon your own perceptions, what factors could enable greater teacher retention rates in other statistically similar school environments like Calhoun County High School?