In Search of Successful Urban Teacher Retention Strategies:
Exploring Educators’ Perceptions and Experiences
A thesis presented by
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Abstract

Teacher retention continues to be one of the most significant challenges in American Public Education. High poverty schools lose over half of their teaching staff every 5 years (Gray & Taie, 2015; Hemphill, Nauer, Zelon, & Jacobs, 2009; Pedota, 2015; Wronowski, 2017). Students in high-poverty schools are more likely than their peers at wealthier schools to be taught by teachers who are new to the profession (Hemphill et al., 2009, Simon & Johnson, 2013). Retaining teachers in urban middle schools, where the most at-risk students need more stability and effective teachers is especially problematic. This case study examined teacher retention at Broom Middle School (BMS), a high-poverty urban middle school situated in upstate New York. The following research question guided the study: How do veteran educators in an urban middle school perceive the challenges and opportunities associated with teacher retention? Forty-four middle school teachers with five years or more experience participated. The study consisted of an anonymous questionnaire, one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews and document review. Major findings indicated that a principal’s ability to develop relationships, build trust, share decision making, and assist with conflict management were important facets of teacher retention. Additionally, the school setting, specifically the ways in which teachers new to the profession are socialized, can have a powerful impact on a teacher’s sense of efficacy and, in turn, increase retention. The recommendations for practice include strengthening building leadership, developing teacher leaders, revamping mentor programs and supporting all teachers with reflective processes in understanding the needs of students in poverty.
Acknowledgements

“Let it be so. Let it be now. Let it be.”
- Maria Gullo

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Chapter 1: Overview

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore educator perceptions about teacher retention in an urban district. The study will present the views of various stakeholders in an urban district regarding the school’s practices, policies, characteristics, and conditions and how they are related to the ability to retain teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Retaining the best and brightest teachers in the profession remains a major issue for our nation’s schools. The teaching profession, which was once considered a “stable, high status profession,” has become tenuous and is experiencing a decline (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 2). Job-related factors that contribute to attrition among teachers include high stakes testing, retrenchment of tenure, and increased pressure to improve student outcomes (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Retaining staff in urban areas continues to be a problem (Jacobs, 2007). The problems caused by turnover are most severe in underserved communities, where students are frequently taught by less experienced teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2013). A higher percentage of teachers from high-poverty schools (12%) than from mid-low or low-poverty schools (6% each) moved to other schools between 2011–12 and 2012–13 (Aragon, 2016). Teachers who leave schools that serve low-income or low-achieving students typically choose schools with a distinctly different demographic profile, such as more affluent schools with higher-achieving students (Bacolod, 2007; Chandler, Lukekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). When a teacher leaves a school, the school and students not only lose the teacher, but also
the investments of time and money including teacher workshops, in-service training, and relationship development (Dworkin, 1987; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2013; Waddell, 2010).

This study will examine teacher retention at Broom Middle School (BMS), a high-poverty urban middle school situated in the Broom School District (BSD) in upstate New York. The New York State Annual School Report Card for 2014-15 to 2015-16 (NYSED, 2017) reported an average statewide turnover rate of 21% for teachers with less than 5 years experience and 11% turnover for all teachers. The statistics for BMS are similar to the state report on both accounts. In addition, it has been increasingly difficult for BMS to fill teacher openings due to retirements. As of August 2017, 10% of the district’s teaching positions were unfilled.

Challenges common to urban districts are prevalent in this city school system. Chronic absenteeism is approximately 40% districtwide, and all students receive free breakfast and lunch. BSD is designated a Focus District (NYSED, 2012) and the BMS is a Focus School (NYSED, 2012) within this district. In New York, Focus Districts have schools with low academic performance and/or low graduation rates for certain groups of students, such as those who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and English language learners (NYSED, 2012). For the 2016-17 school year, 15% of the students at BMS were designated as proficient on the 6-8 New York State English Language Assessment (ELA) assessments. The proficiency rate among Hispanic students was 9%, among students with disabilities it was 5%, and among the English language learners it was 0% (NYSED, 2012). The results are similar for mathematics. The 2015-16 graduation rates for the district show similar disparities among
subgroups even though the graduation rate has been on the rise since 2010 (see Table 1, based on
data from data.nysed.gov.

Table 1

*Graduation Rate Comparison*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>2010 BSD graduation rate</th>
<th>2016 BSD graduation rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic students</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>no subgroup existed</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BSD may be set apart from other urban districts in that it is situated in an economically
depressed region of New York. According to the most current data from the United States Census
Bureau website, the county poverty rate of 6.1%, is one of the highest in the state. The city has
not experienced the upswing in economic conditions that other suburban areas in the capital
region have. The community flourished and offered a number of economic opportunities through
the early 1970s. However, the mills left and businesses moved to states that offered lower tax
rates and business incentives. The once-thriving community, whose population 30 years ago was
20% economically disadvantaged and 15% minority, now is home to a 70% economically
disadvantaged population where, just this last year, the minority population has become the
majority. There has been a 65% increase in the Hispanic population between 2000 and 2010. The Limited English Proficient students have increased threefold over the last 10 years, which means that additional Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESOL) staffing is required. This staffing has been difficult to find and sustain. According to the most current data from the United States Census Bureau website, the crime index has increased 54% in the city since 2002 and students are coming to school with issues that were not seen to this extent 30 years ago.

According to Creswell (2017), case study research is suitable for answering questions that start with how, who, and why, and is well suited for investigating events that are occurring in a contemporary context. This qualitative case study will look at teacher retention through the lenses of middle school educators. Obtaining their input on why they have entered and then stayed in the field might provide districts with information they can use to increase teacher retention. The case study will survey and interview veteran teachers and administrators at BMS. It will explore the issue of teacher retention by collecting documents, surveying individuals anonymously, and interviewing select staff members to gain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions about building and district practices that support teacher retention.

Significance of the Research

The retention of a positive and motivated staff is vital to a school's success. High teacher turnover increases expenses and negatively affects student achievement. It takes between five and seven years to develop an effective teacher, yet the attrition rate of teachers in urban schools implies that over half the teachers leave before they are fully developed (Waddell. 2010; Wong, Wong & Seroyer, 2009). As a consequence, many students in urban schools are denied the opportunity to learn from master teachers. Teacher turnover has a significant and negative effect
on student achievement in both ELA and mathematics (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). The connections and themes that will be provided by this case study will help stakeholders understand the factors that lead teachers to want to stay or leave the BMS.

This research will provide insights that can guide districts in developing new systems to support staff. This chronically high level of turnover is bad for schools and students, and compromises our ability to ensure that all students have access to great teaching and learning. Until we address the conditions that contribute to teachers leaving schools at a systems level, we will not be able to fulfill the promise that every child will have access to quality teaching in schools that are organized for success.

The research will discover strategies that education policy makers can implement to address the persistent challenge of ensuring that students who attend urban schools are taught by highly effective teachers. The study will highlight educators’ perspectives on what is needed to ensure retention of effective teachers at an urban school. It will identify policies that schools as organizations (practices, policies, characteristics, and conditions) could adopt to improve their ability to effectively and efficiently staff classrooms.

**Research Questions**

The following research question will guide the study: How do veteran educators in an urban middle school perceive the challenges and opportunities associated with teacher retention?

**Definitions of Key Terminology**

**Attrition.** Attrition is a reduction in the number of employees, usually as a result of resignation or retirement (Grissmer, 197; Ingersoll, 2001).
**Induction.** Induction involves orientation and training of an employee in an organization’s culture, showing how he or she is interconnected to (and interdependent with) everyone else in the organization (Ingersoll, 2001).

**Mentor.** A mentor is an experienced person at a company, college, or school who trains and counsels new employees or student (Darling- Hammond, 2003).

**Novice teachers.** Novice teachers are those who are in their first three years of their teaching careers (Darling- Hammond, 2003).

**Teacher retention.** Teacher retention is a field of education research that focuses on how factors such as school characteristics and teacher demographics affect whether teachers stay in their schools, move to different schools, or leave the profession (Ingersoll, 2001).

**Urban school:** An urban school is one that is located in an urban area rather than in a rural, small town, or suburban area. An urban school is in an area that has a relatively high rate of poverty, has been designated as “high needs,” has a relatively high proportion of students of color, and a relatively high proportion of students who are limited English proficient (as reported by New York State Education Department).

**Veteran teacher:** A veteran teacher is one who has attained tenure and who typically has more than three years of full-time classroom experience and is no longer a novice to the teaching profession (Darling- Hammond, 2003).

**Theoretical Framework**

The discourse around teacher attrition and retention describes the problem not only as retaining teachers, rather than also sustaining beginning teachers in a profession where they will feel fulfilled and see themselves making a strong contribution (Lee, 1971; Schaefer, Long, &
Clandinin, 2012). Recent work in Canada and the United States has studied what keeps teachers teaching (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009; Nelson, Antayá-Moore, Badley, & Coleman, 2010; Nieto, 2003; Young et al., 2010). This research offers a promising way to understand not only what retains, but also what sustains, teachers in teaching (Schaefer et al., 2012).

According to Rinke (2008), beginning teacher attrition literature displays a dichotomy between locating the problem of attrition within contexts (e.g., contextual conceptions such as support) or within individuals (e.g., individualized conceptions such as burnout). In much of the research on early career teacher attrition, the focus on individual factors and contextual factors has directed attention towards why teachers leave. The experiences of the people involved may end up being stripped away in the effort to find a general solution to the perceived problem.

Rinke (2008) called for research that inquires simultaneously into contextual and individual conceptualizations. Flores and Day (2006), in their Portuguese study, noted that the complex negotiation of identity includes both contextual and individual factors. Although studying contextual and individual conceptualizations separately may be easier, it does not frame the problem in a way that takes beginning teachers’ whole lives, in all their complexities, into account. Therefore, this researcher will utilize organizational identity to frame this study of teacher retention.

**Organizational culture.** Organizational culture is commonly understood as the system of values, norms, beliefs, and practices shared by the members of an organization (Martin, 1992). Organizational culture provides a means of considering the social nature of organizational life by illuminating notions of belonging and inclusion. Members of an organization are related to one another through their collective participation in shared practice, and the more pronounced the
cultural, the stronger the feeling of connection (Thompson, 2014). The most commonly used framework for understanding organizational culture comes from the organizational sciences, and was developed by Schein (1985, 1991). According to Schein, organizational culture exists simultaneously on three levels that build on one another. Underlying assumptions include foundational ideologies and the taken-for-granted beliefs that are so widely shared that people are not aware of them. An example for schools might be that all children can learn, or that schools are places for learning. Values and beliefs are social principles that are assumed to have intrinsic worth and importance and are the most fundamental ideas about what is important in the organization, frequently expressed as, “What we are all about” (Thompson, 2014). Artifacts is the third level; it includes tangible elements of culture such as ceremonies, stories or myths, practices, and routines that give substance to the organization’s values. Hatch (1993) expanded on Schein’s theory to include organizational members in the model of organizational culture. She wrote about ways in which culture is made and remade, with the members of the organization as the critical component.

Organizational identity (OI). While it is fundamentally tied to organizational culture, organizational identity (OI) has distinct attributes that are particularly important to this study. OI seeks to answer the question: "Who are we as an organization?” (Albert & Whetten, 1985). While culture is theorized as the internal experience of values, beliefs, and practices of the organization, identity is the external expression of organizational culture. Identity is the face of the organization, what it is and what it values. Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994) defined OI as what organizational members believe others see as distinctive about the organization.
Organizational identity is a field of study in organizational theory, that seeks the answer to the question: "who are we as an organization?" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, pg.15). Organizational identity and identification have a profound impact on many organizational behaviors, and therefore on the functioning of an organization and the achievement of its objectives. “The beauty of the identity and identification concepts is that they provide a way of accounting for the agency of human action within an organizational framework” (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000, p. 18). Organizational identity is taken to mean the internal, that is, the employees’ view of the organization.

In originating the concept of organizational identity, Albert and Whetten (1) built on theories of how individual identities are formed. They looked to the theories of Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and Erving Goffman, who all held that the “self” has both an individual and a social aspect. Extending these ideas to organizations, Albert and Whetten (1985) stated that organizational identity is “the central character of an organization, the distinctive qualities it claims to possess, and the enduring manifestation of its identity over time” (p. 18). Following this notion of “Who am I in relationship to the organization?” organizational identity is (a) what is taken by employees to be the central attributes of the organization; (b) what makes the organization distinctive and, therefore, unique from other organizations in the eyes of the employees; and (c) what is perceived by employees to be enduring or continuing, regardless of objective changes in the organizational environments (Witting, 2006, p. 2).

Since Albert and Whetten introduced their premise in 1985, scholars have explored how organizations can have multiple identities and how organizational identities can change (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 660). Hatch and Schultz (2002) offered a model of organizational identity
Organizational identification has long been recognized as a critical constraint on organizational behavior, affecting both the satisfaction of the individuals and the effectiveness of the organization (Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Lee, 1971; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Patchen, 1970; Rotondi, 1975).

Much of the research on OI builds on the idea that identity is a relational construct formed in interaction with others (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Identity underpins OI as a social process (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). The characteristics of schools have long been considered among the important aspects of effective school organization (Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999; Chubb & Moe, 2011; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Goodlad, 1984; Ingersoll, 2001). Hatch (2002) added to OI theory by proposing a dynamic process in which culture shapes identity (internal to external) and identity shapes culture (external to internal). She went on to propose that “organizational culture is expressed through identity claims” (p. 995) and used Mead’s (1934) theory of the “I” and “me” to illuminate the relationship between internal processes of culture and external pronouncements of identity. Mead theorizes that the self arises through a process of social experience and activity: My sense of myself is constituted in relation to others and is based on how I am in relation to those around me. Hatch (1993) applies this principle to OI. The “I” relates to organizational culture -- the internal experiences of values, beliefs, and practices -- and the “me” relates to image – the external face of the organization. For schools, an example could be the official designation of failure being labeled as “Program Improvement” (Thompson, 2014). This message would interact with the existing culture of the school, be taken up and affirmed or resisted, and
ultimately be manifest as identity claims. What is important here is the active process of social negotiation. OI is a relational construct formed in interaction with the environment.

What factors lead to retention? Organizational theory provides a guiding framework for finding answers to this question. This framework supports the research because OI is the study of formal social organizations and their interrelationship with the environment in which they exist. According to Bolman and Deal (2013), an organization exists to help meet human needs: “People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities” (p. 117). Human behavior and decisions are driven by motivations that are unique to each person; these affect how problems are solved and needs are met. The theoretical constructs of organizational identity, culture, and commitment can be combined with the premise of organizational fit to explain why teachers are attracted to a school, how they experience it as a workplace, and what contributes to their decision to continue teaching there (Thompson, 2014). When individuals feel valued, supported, and needed by an organization, and feel ownership within it, they become more loyal and committed to it (Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe, & Stinglhamber, 2005; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Ng, Butts, Vandenberg, DeJoy, & Wilson, 2006; Rousseau, 1998).

Organizational identification can affect both the satisfaction and behavior of employees as well as the effectiveness of the organization (Albert et al., 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hall & Schneider, 1972; Lee, 1971; O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Many have often confused organizational identification with related constructs such as organizational commitment, organizational internalization, affect, and behaviors, which could be seen as antecedents and/or consequences of identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). From an interpretivist perspective,
organizational identity is an emergent phenomenon that arises from the social and communicative interactions between organization members. Therefore, according to Hatch and Shultz (2002), organizational identity is the internal perspective of members who identify with the organization in a dynamic relationship where identity, culture, and image influence one another.

Summary

Organizational identity provides a lens through which teacher retention at an urban middle school can be viewed. Teacher attrition is a complex phenomenon that involves many variables. All of the reviewed studies focus on the organizational and social perspectives of educators, their decision to remain in the field, and the support that they have or have not received. The OI framework acknowledges the complexity of this phenomenon by taking a more holistic approach in order to inform policy and address this important area of public concern.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews research on the myriad of factors that lead to teacher attrition and retention. Urban, rural, high-poverty, high-minority, and low-achieving schools face persistent staffing challenges. Lack of administrative support, geographic isolation, poor compensation, poor working conditions, low teacher efficacy, and lack of collective teacher influence over school-wide decisions contribute to teacher attrition, particularly in urban settings (Aragon, 2016; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). This chapter reviews research in the following areas: why teachers stay or leave, teacher retention and attrition implications, urban teacher attrition and specifically, urban middle school attrition.
Why Teachers Stay or Leave

While personal characteristics, teacher preparation, and teacher efficacy all affect teacher retention, school climate is perhaps the strongest indicator of whether or not teachers will remain in the profession (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Simon & Johnson, 2013; Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007). Ingersoll and May (2011) stated, “Data suggest that the roots of the teacher shortage largely reside in the working conditions within schools and districts.” In a survey of 217 first- and second-year teachers, six of the top eight reasons teachers considered leaving the profession were related to school climate (Wynn et al., 2007). Salary was the most cited reason (82%), followed by disruptive students (58%), administrative support (43%), lack of parental involvement (42%), working conditions (38%), lack of professional prestige (31%), personal reasons (30%), and lack of collegiality (19%). Ingersoll and May (2012) stated “Organizational factors such as administrative support, teacher input in decision making, salary, and aspects of school culture (especially student discipline) were associated with higher rates of turnover, even when controlling for location, school level, and demographic characteristics of teachers and students" (p. 32).

Teachers influence student learning more than any other school-based factor (Ingersoll, Merrill & May, 2016; McCaffrey, , Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Turnover is higher among young and old teachers than among middle-aged ones (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo et al., 2009; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; W. B. Johnson & Zlotnik, 2005; Wronowski, 2017). Turnover is also higher among less experienced teachers than among more experienced ones (Ingersoll, 2001; Marvel et al., 2007; Ryan et al., 2017). The highest rates of
attrition in the teaching profession occur during the first years of teaching (Guarino et al., 2006; Ryan et al., 2017). Attrition is higher early in teachers’ careers because they have accumulated less specific capital, or knowledge specific to teaching; attrition diminishes later, when teachers have increased their teaching-specific capital (Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Many younger teachers do not leave the profession indefinitely, however: instead they leave teaching for only a period of time. These re-entrants comprise a significant portion of annual teacher hires (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997; Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 2009; Pedota, 2015; Stinebrickner, 2001). S. M. Johnson and Birkeland (2003), in a descriptive analysis of longitudinal interview data from teachers in their first and second years in Massachusetts public schools, found that those who left the profession either saw their careers as short-term occupations or had experienced frustration or a sense of failure. In a nationwide longitudinal study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, among all beginning teachers in 2007–08, 10 percent did not teach in 2008–09, 12 percent did not teach in 2009–10, 15 percent did not teach in 2010–11, and 17 percent did not teach in 2011–12 (Gray & Taie, 2015).

Researchers also have linked teacher quality measures to attrition behavior. Teachers with stronger qualifications, as measured by their own test scores and the competitiveness of the undergraduate institutions from which they received degrees, are more likely to leave teaching (Boyd et al., 2009). However, teachers who are more effective, as measured by the test score gains of the students in their classrooms, are less likely to leave teaching (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Cochrane-Smith et al, 2012; Goldhaber, Gross, & Player, 2007; Hanushek et al., 2004; Pedota, 2015; Rothstein, 2014).
On average, teachers with strong academic backgrounds are prone to move to higher income schools with better student achievement if they do not leave teaching altogether. Teachers who teach hard-to-stay subjects such as mathematics and science, rarely stay in hard-to-staff schools (Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Studies have also demonstrated that urban schools attract and retain few teachers who (a) come from prestigious universities, (b) score high on standardized tests, (c) hold advanced degrees, or (d) have National Board Certification (Guarino et al., 2006; Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004). Math and science teachers have a higher attrition rate than teachers of other subjects. High-need schools don’t just lose teachers: they lose the teachers who have the most desirable qualifications.

Some recent large-scale studies have indicated that teachers of color have higher turnover rates than White teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Marvel et al., 2007). Other recent studies, mostly qualitative ones, have indicated that new teachers of color (African American, Latina/o, Asian American, mixed race) may be more motivated and committed than new White teachers to choose to continue teaching in high-poverty urban schools (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Villegas & Irvine, 2009).

It is important to develop policies to attract, retain, and support the continued learning of well-prepared and committed teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Efforts to solve staffing problems have often focused on recruiting promising teachers into high-needs schools, while often paying little attention to the systems supporting and retaining them once they arrive (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Analyzing the data on these characteristics through an organizational lens may provide districts with better strategies for hiring and retaining teachers.
Teacher salary. While few teachers enter teaching with expectations of becoming wealthy, they do expect to earn a respectable salary and live a comfortable lifestyle. Teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages (Hendricks, 2014). Eighty-nine percent of teachers with a starting salary of $40,000 or more were still teaching after five years, compared to 80 percent of teachers with lower starting salaries (Gray & Taie, 2015). Teacher salaries across the country often start low, stay low throughout their careers, and end with weak retirement savings. Teacher salaries are generally lower than those offered to other college graduates (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Beginning teachers earn about 20% less than people with college degrees in other fields, a wage gap that can widen to 30% by mid-career (Baker, Farrie, & Sciarra, 2016). This gap has grown over time. In 1994, public school teachers’ earnings were similar to those of other college graduates, taking into account the length of the work year. By 2015, teachers earned 11% less in total compensation (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). Additionally, teachers’ can see large salary inequities within the same labor market. According to an analysis by Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2011), the best paid teachers in low-poverty schools earned 35% more than their counterparts in high-poverty schools.

Researchers have shown that increased salary is negatively related to attrition (Brewer, 1996; Imazeki, 2005; Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 1999; Krieg, 2006; Murnane et al., 2009; Podgursky et al., 2004; Stockard & Lehman, 2004), but positively related to switching schools (Boyd et al., 2009; Hanushek et al. 2004). Some evidence exists that the salary increases necessary to neutralize turnover are so high that this is not a viable policy tool for limiting teacher turnover on a national scale (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Imazeki, 2005).
A 2011 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) study showed that pay for teachers in the United States ranked near the bottom of the list of nations participating: they received only 60% of the wages of other college-educated workers (Jennings, 2012). Countries with higher achieving students rarely experience teacher shortages and have teacher salaries that are equitable and comparable to other professions (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Inadequate and unequal salaries translate into fewer qualified teachers and greater turnover in schools, particularly in those with the neediest students (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Whipp & Geronime, 2017).

Career decisions often depend on expected compensation many years in the future, so studies of the effects of teacher pay on retention have been difficult (Rothstein, 2014). Recent studies of short-term interventions and performance pay programs in the United States have not produced promising results (Fryer, 2013; Goodman & Turner, 2013). Rothstein (2015) stated that compensation and retention decisions can “condition only on a sequence of noisy performance signals, which might be value added scores or some alternative” (p. 101). He explained that teachers who enter the field confident in their own ability will update their desire to stay with each positive performance measure. If a teacher feels successful in the environment and the expectation of being fired decreases, the prospect of performance bonuses may keep that teacher in the profession. Hence salary alone is not an indicator, rather it is potentially one variable among many.

Teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy refers to the extent to which a teacher feels able to help students learn and succeed, even those students who may be difficult or unmotivated (Kitsantas, Ware, & Cheema, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). It can influence
performance, commitment, and professional retention (Boyd et al. 2009, Darling-Hammond, 2003; Guskey, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Teachers who are self-efficacious are more likely to plan appropriate activities, engage their students, persist when students are struggling, and expend a considerable amount of effort to find appropriate methods and materials. Conversely, teachers with low self-efficacy are more likely to contribute their successes or failures to outside factors such as lack of resources (Kitsantas et al., 2010).

According to Pedota (2015), teachers who exhibit high self-efficacy in their daily routines with students not only are more likely to have students who achieve but also are more likely to remain in the profession.

Sustained professional learning communities are evidence of collective efficacy because teachers believe they can impact student achievement together (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008). This collective efficacy, which is defined as “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997), needs to be studied in an effort to analyze an organization’s effectiveness. Bandura noted that collective efficacy requires group judgment and effort, along with persistence and willingness for the group to remain cohesive. Mayer, Mullens, and Moore (2000) emphasized the importance of cohesiveness, defined as the school faculty collectively taking responsibility for student learning.

Student success or lack of success affects teacher self-efficacy, and ultimately decisions about remaining in the profession (Pedota, 2015). Some beginning teachers leave the profession early because they do not feel effective (Scherer & Darling-Hammond, 2012). The more problems new teachers encounter, the more likely they are to leave the profession. This supports
the belief that many factors during the first few years influence a teacher’s decision to stay or leave the profession (Redman, 2015).

**School leadership and support.** The quality of support from administrators is often the main factor that teachers identify as their reason for staying or leaving the profession (Podolsky et al.; 2017). School leaders are crucial to a school’s success. Principals are linked directly to student achievement (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009), as well as to school operations, motivating teachers and students, identifying and articulating vision and goals, developing high performance expectations, fostering communication, allocating resources, and developing organizational structures to support instruction and learning (Knapp, Copland, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). School administrators can affect the instructional quality of schools through teacher recruitment, development, and retention (Harris, Rutledge, Ingle & Thompson, 2006).

Several studies relate administrative support to teacher retention. Ladd (2011) analyzed teachers’ responses to North Carolina school climate surveys and discovered that teachers’ perceptions of school leadership are more predictive of teachers’ intentions to remain in the school than are their perceptions of any other school working condition (Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011). The higher the teachers perceived the quality of school leadership, the less likely they were to be either planning to or actually leave their schools. Similarly, in a study of all the first-year teachers in New York City in 2005, which included surveys at the end of their first year of teaching and 1 year later, Boyd et al. (2011) found that dissatisfaction with school administration had by far the greatest influence of all the working condition factors on these teachers’ decisions to stay at or leave their schools. S. M. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) and Boyd et al. (2011)
reported that dissatisfaction with the school’s principal or with the school’s administration was the most significant reason given by teachers who quit teaching altogether or moved to another school.

“Employees’ immediate leaders play an important role in their daily work lives in an organization. Thus leaders’ behaviors may shape how employees view their relationship and social identifications with their work organization” (He & Brown, 2013, p. 13). DuFour and Marzano (2009) advocated for “learning leaders” who would shift their focus from supervising and evaluating teachers to providing time for collaboration, analysis, and enhancing teaching and learning.

**Collegial support.** It is clear that teachers need support early in their careers in order to succeed in the classroom and remain at their schools (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012). Early career teachers need their schools to build opportunities for ongoing professional development into their work day. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) concluded that beginning teachers who participated in a systematic mentoring or induction program had higher job satisfaction, commitment, and retention than teachers not involved in such programs. They went on to say, however, that induction’s efficacy may depend on the school setting and that induction alone “may not be sufficient to reduce the high levels of teacher turnover that normally exist in many urban, low-income, public schools” (p. 41). It is unclear what types of mentoring and induction programs are most successful; however, teachers are more likely to stay in schools that have a professional culture, provide opportunities to work collaboratively with their colleagues (including mentoring through formal induction), and a shared mission among teachers (Allensworth et al., 2009; Guarino et al., 2006; W. B. Johnson & Zlotnik, 2005; Thompson, 2014).
Organizational support. From an organizational perspective, the bonds employees form with their work teams and organizations have a profound effect on how they experience work (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Riketta, 2005). Organizational support is the extent to which teachers believe their school values their contributions and cares about their well being. A key implication of the influence of organizational identity (OI) on cooperative behavior and performance is that organizational efforts to promote employee identification with the organization will improve performance at all levels—individual, team, and organizational. When employees identify with their organization, they will work for it (Mesmer-Magnus, Asencio, Seely, & DeChurch, 2015). The quality of teachers’ experiences as they work with one another contributes to their overall sense of what matters to the school (Simon & Johnson, 2013).

OI refers to relatively shared understandings concerning what is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization that give meaning to members’ experience of work, and which derive from a complex of interactions by multiple actors from across professional groups and hierarchical levels (Pratt, Schultz, Ashforth, & Ravasi, 2016).

Employee OI has been found to be positively related to a number of leadership styles, including transformational leadership (Carmeli, Atwater, & Levi, 2011; Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010) and ethical leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2011) which, as stated previously, are proven to be related to teacher retention.

Student behavior. While teaching is highly interpersonal in nature, teachers are isolated from their colleagues for most of their working day. Most of the day is spent with the students, which can be a source of stress for teachers. Some studies found student discipline to be a major
factor related to attrition (Rieg, Paquette, & Chen, 2007); other studies have revealed that student behavior was potentially a source of stress but not necessarily a source of attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2010, Day & Hong, 2016; Hanushek & Rivken, 2010). According to Dinham and Scott (1998), student achievement, behavior, and attitude are powerful satisfiers and do not necessarily lead to an intention to quit. Ingersoll & May (2011), however, explained that a lack of control in the classroom may make teachers feel hindered and ineffective, leading them to pursue other employment options.

School-level decorum affects teachers’ instruction and influences their decisions to stay or leave (Simon & Johnson, 2013). Teachers want to be in schools that have schoolwide norms and policies for behavior and consistent discipline policies (S. M. Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kraft et al., 2016; Marinell & Coca, 2013), High-poverty schools have more reports of student discipline issues than wealthier schools (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010), which could be a result of both in-school and out-of-school factors (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Kraft et al., 2016).

**Teacher autonomy and decision-making influence.** Teachers derive greater satisfaction from their work and are more likely to stay in teaching when they perceive they have greater autonomy and the opportunity to contribute to schoolwide decision making (S. M. Johnson, 2006; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2016). This includes decisions about scheduling, selection of materials, and selection of professional development experiences (Allensworth et al. 2009). It also includes opportunities for professional collaboration and participation on teams that work towards a common goal (NCES, 2013; S. M. Johnson et al., 2012, Podolsky et al., 2017). Teachers who have more freedom in choosing textbooks, instructional techniques, classroom
discipline, and grading policies tend to report lower levels of stress (Byrne, 1994; Sutton & Huberty, 1984) and are more satisfied with their jobs (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982).

Professional learning communities (PLC) provide opportunities for teachers to engage in regular research and collaboration. They have been found effective as a means for connecting professional learning to the day-to-day realities faced by teachers in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2011; DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2010; Wynn et al., 2007). Teachers who are part of a PLC engage in action research, support each other, and work together to find common consensus regarding the best approaches to achieving student success (DuFour & DuFour, 2013). Schools that build supportive environments give teachers continuous opportunities to grow and learn and provide them with the tools they need to do their job, become successful in their work, and stay (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014).

**Parent engagement.** Parent-teacher interactions are shaped by school structures that foster communication between teachers and parents and enable parental participation in the school community (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Allensworth et al., 2009, Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Simon & Johnson, 2013). This also shapes teachers’ satisfaction with their working conditions (Allensworth et al., 2009; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005) and can predict turnover (Allensworth et al., 2009). Parental involvement in joint problem solving about student behavior is more predictive of teacher retention than other forms of parental support, such as helping with homework.
Teacher Retention and Attrition Implications

While modest rates of turnover might help schools (Simon & Johnson, 2013), a pattern of chronic turnover can destabilize learning communities and directly affect student learning, school communities, and school and district costs (Achinstein Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Allensworth et al., 2009; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Teacher turnover rates have been rising since the mid 1980s and are much higher than in most high-paying, high-status professions (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education reported that 90,000 fewer teachers were in training in 2012 than in 2008 (Wronowski, 2017).

Teacher attrition consumes time and funding through the termination process, recruitment of replacements, hiring substitutes to fill vacancies, orientation, professional development, and mentoring (Simon & Johnson, 2013; Wronowski, 2017). Educational researchers have used business and educational models to try to put a price on teacher turnover. Cost estimates range from $2.1 billion to $7.3 billion depending on the variables considered (Synar & Maiden, 2012). According to Synar and Maiden (2012), on average, training costs comprise 48.15% of the total turnover costs and performance productivity comprises approximately 41% of them. They stated that these soft costs are often overlooked because they are highly variable and intangible.

These costs go beyond the financial struggles created by the time and money being spent on recruiting and hiring when it could be spent on improving practice and resources for students. This contributes to widening the gap between low-income and wealthier schools (Grissom, 2011). Disruption in instructional continuity results in student instructional programs that are less comprehensive and unified (Guin, 2004; Simon & Johnson, 2013), which directly affects the learning process. Beginning teachers tend to be less effective than the somewhat more
experienced teachers they replace, which affects student growth and understanding (S. M. Johnson et al., 2013).

**Urban Teacher Attrition**

Schools serving the neediest children lose over half of their teaching staff every 5 years (Allensworth et al., 2009; Gray & Taie, 2015; Hemphill, Nauer, Zelon, & Jacobs, 2009; Pedota, 2015; Wronowski, 2017). Thus, students at high-poverty schools are more likely than their peers at wealthier schools to experience inconsistent staffing from one year to the next and to be taught by teachers who are new to their school and the profession (Hanushek et al., 2004; Hemphill et al., 2009, Simon & Johnson, 2013).

*Figure 1.* Teacher turnover in proportion with poverty. Figure 1 created by the Albert Shanker Institute, a nonprofit institution endowed by the American Federation of Teachers (www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/update-teacher-turnover-us), demonstrates teacher turnover
varies by the proportion of schools’ students eligible for free-/reduced-price lunch (FRL) (Gray & Taie, 2015).

The community outside an urban school is more complex than their suburban and rural counterparts, so teachers are called upon to confront issues and problems that they may not be adequately prepared to handle. Teachers can therefore burn out. Teacher burnout and poor retention has exploded in urban schools due to factors including high stakes testing, low efficacy, poor administrative support, and difficult student behavior (Dworkin, 1987; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Gray & Taie, 2015; Ingersoll & Merril, 2011; Moore, 2008).

First-year teachers who leave high-poverty schools may be the more effective ones, as they have the opportunity to go elsewhere (Eckert, 2013). In a recent study of high needs districts in Texas, Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) found that although veteran teachers who chose to leave high needs districts tended to be “less effective” than their counterparts who chose to stay, first-year teachers in these districts who changed schools or moved to another district were often more effective than those first-year teachers who chose to stay.

**Urban teacher preparation.** Recruiting teachers in urban districts is challenging. Filling urban teaching vacancies is likely to become increasingly difficult because the top teacher-producing states -- California, New York, Texas, and North Carolina -- are all reporting sharp declines in enrollment in teacher preparation programs (Wronowski, 2017). The U.S. Department of Education reported that there were 90,000 fewer teachers in 2012 than in 2008 (Wronowski, 2017). Current recruitment practices focus on identifying people who have high academic achievement or cognitive abilities, yet the correlation of these recruitment strategies to teacher retention is unclear (Haberman, 2012; Ronfeldt, Kwok & Reninger, 2016; Wronowski, 2017).
Poverty presents such challenges that neither preparation level nor teacher qualification status can reliably predict retention for teachers in urban districts (Eckert, 2013). The credentials and qualifications commonly reviewed during recruiting do not present the whole picture of a teacher’s likelihood of success in urban districts.

Qualitative factors such as teachers’ belief that all students can succeed may be an important indicator that needs to be included in the recruiting practices. Urban schools tend to have a higher concentration of students who are not achieving at grade level. This often results in an incorrect generalization that urban school students have a lower capacity to learn (Vass, 2017; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). Research on teachers working with diverse students shows that very few teacher education programs have successfully tackled the problem of training teachers for an urban setting (Moore, 2008; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Many teachers lack understanding of inequality and cultural diversity (Moore, 2008) and therefore are not equipped to remain in an urban setting.

**Geography.** In seeking their first jobs, prospective teachers tend to search close to their hometowns and in regions similar to where they grew up (Shirrell & Reininger, 2017; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Geographical location and the importance of distance in teachers’ preferences add another challenge to urban districts. “Teachers strongly prefer to teach close to their hometowns, and, if they do not stay local, they tend to work in schools that serve students with similar characteristics to the students where the teachers themselves are from” (Engle & Cannata, 2015, p. 87). The number of teacher recruits whose hometown is urban falls short of the number of positions being filled in urban districts, requiring those districts to attract teachers from other regions (Shirrell & Reininger, 2017; Engle & Cannata, 2015; Whipp & Geronime, 2017).
Because students from hard-to-staff schools typically are less likely to perform well academically and are less likely to graduate, the local nature of the workforce reinforces the existing deficits of teacher supply (Shirrell & Reininger, 2017).

**Relationships.** Repeated turnover impedes the continuity that would build the sustained relationships among teachers, students, and families that are especially needed by our impoverished students (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Ronfeldt et al. (2013) suggested that an unstable teaching culture not only affects students but also reduces collegiality and relational trust among faculty and contributes to a loss of the institutional knowledge among faculty that is critical to support learning (p. 18).

**School facilities and resources.** Teacher working conditions are often much worse in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty ones. This contributes to high rates of teacher turnover (S. M. Johnson et al., 2012). Teacher retention rates tend to be higher at schools that have sufficient instructional materials and supplies, as well as safe and clean facilities (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Educational resources include both money and the things that money can buy, including books, buildings, libraries, and teachers' formal qualifications. (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003). For most of U.S. history, traditional educational resources were seen as the secret to making schools work. Educators, parents, and policymakers assumed that money, curriculum materials, facilities, and their regulation, led to learning (Cohen et al., 2003). The amount of resources allocated to a school can affect schools both positively and negatively.

Urban districts suffer from multiple problems that make it more likely that they will waste resources and fail to translate the funding they have into effective learning. The problem is not only that funding and other resources are inadequate to the educational and non-educational
needs of urban students, but also that structural conditions may make urban districts unable to do as much with the resources they have (Grubb, 2009). Older buildings and lack of space are examples of structural conditions that may impede change.

**Urban Middle School Teacher Attrition**

Teachers at the middle school level represent an understudied group. Middle schools have characteristics that distinguish them from elementary and high schools. Middle school students are perhaps the most challenging to teach because of the rapid physical and emotional development they experience (O’Brien, 2007; Synar & Maiden, 2012). The characteristics of middle school students require educators who are responsive to the developmental needs of this age group. In 2013, the Research Alliance for New York City Schools completed a 3-year comprehensive study of middle school teacher turnover. More than half of middle school teachers who entered their school during the last decade left that school within 3 years, significantly higher than the rates seen for elementary and high school teachers. Most of the teachers who leave exit the public school system altogether, and only about one in 10 transition to another Grade 6-8 school. According to Harley (2010), the purpose of the distinctive characteristics of a middle school education:

- is to promote intellectual development for young adolescence and enable everyone to think creatively, to problem solve and work well with others and develop factual knowledge and skills that help all students at this age level meet or exceed academic standards. (p. 8)

Such characteristics may be related to job satisfaction.
Research has examined issues that teachers in urban secondary schools persistently face. These teachers typically have been frustrated with poor and underrepresented students (Gomez, 1993; Strunk & Robinson, 2006), and lack understanding of these students’ home life or culture (Manning & Baruth, 2017). Persistent issues with student attendance exacerbate classroom tensions (Manning & Baruth, 2017). Ottoman (2011) reported that 34% of city secondary school students missed at least one month of school. Middle schools may be most affected by teacher turnover because of the interdependence of middle school staff and the sensitivity of early adolescents (Ingersoll, Merrill & May, 2016). Research indicates, however, that the “challenges of urban middle schools can often be mitigated when teachers work with strong leadership, a collegial atmosphere, and adequate resources” (Kelly, Gningue, & Qian, 2015, p. 133).

**Summary**

If teachers are to be successful, schools must organize in ways that provide them with the tools, capabilities, and resources they need. Teacher turnover is most profoundly influenced by the organizational conditions at schools. Research has shown that teachers prefer some schools over others (or leave the field altogether) because they are dissatisfied with school organization and are seeking better working conditions (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson et al., 2012). Many of these findings are drawn from quantitative data; while these data highlight the phenomenon, they do not account for how or why the phenomenon exists. For example, while there is mounting agreement that working conditions matter, many studies do not explain how they matter to teachers. This research will highlight the perceptions of educators at a middle school regarding practices for keeping teachers in the district. It will investigate organizational values like collaboration, professional growth, and working
conditions. This work will demonstrate that teachers may be attracted to a school’s strong identity and culture, and they are retained when their work conditions align with that identity and culture.

Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teacher and administrator perceptions of the factors that lead to teacher retention at an urban middle school. The study presented the views of teachers and administrators at an urban middle school about school practices, policies, characteristics, and conditions and how these related to teacher retention. This study examined teacher retention at Broom Middle School (BMS), a high-poverty urban middle school situated in the Broom School District (BSD). It addressed the following research question: How do veteran teachers and administrators at an urban middle school perceive the challenges and opportunities surrounding teacher retention?

This chapter describes the methods used to conduct this study. A qualitative case study was conducted to identify and document veteran teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of the challenges and opportunities surrounding teacher retention at an urban middle school. The results will help school district leaders and policy makers understand effective retention strategies and develop systems to promote teacher retention.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is a complex field of inquiry that draws on many diverse assumptions, but it embraces a few common characteristics and perspectives (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). It is an inductive exploratory method that brings meaning and understanding to complex issues. Qualitative research, according to Rossman and Rallis (2016), recognizes that an
individual enters into a context with his or her own personal perspectives. These perceptions inform his or her actions. Qualitative methods are used either to gain new perspectives on issues about which there is much already known or to gain more in-depth information on issues that are difficult to measure quantitatively. Qualitative research methods collect open-ended, emerging data that is used to develop themes.

Merriam (2009) defined a qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic, description and analysis of an instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). Yin (1994) described case study research as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). Merriam (2009) stated that people are central to this type of study, which collects and analyzes information from interviews. Qualitative research provides an understanding of how people attach meaning to their experiences or how they make sense of their world (Merriam, 2009).

Drawing upon constructivist philosophies, the key focus of qualitative research is to understand the problem at hand from the participants’ perspectives rather than the researcher’s (Merriam, 2009). The interpretivist paradigm assumes that reality is socially created and that there is no single observable reality. Researchers do not find knowledge, rather they construct it (Merriam, 2009). Multiple realities can exist within the context of the problem at hand. The researcher is the primary instrument for collection and analysis; this human component can result in bias.

Rather than perceiving this as a potential shortcoming, it is imperative that we identify and acknowledge the existence of bias and understand how it can shape the collection and
understanding of the data. Peshkin (1988) stated that these subjectivities can be seen as “virtuous” since they provide the opportunity for distinctive and unique insights into the data collected. The researcher must show sensitivity to both the participants and the data gathered. Equally important, the researcher must be a good communicator, being able to relate to and empathize with the participants, ask good questions, and listen. It is only by listening “to many individuals and to many points of view that value-resonant social contexts can be fully, equitably, and honorably represented” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 175).

This qualitative case study took place at an urban school, using multiple methods that were interactive and humanistic, interpreting the emerging data to gain a deeper understanding of the staffing crisis in urban middle schools. This qualitative approach examines multiple layers of an existing problem (Creswell, 1998). This case study research relied upon multiple sources of evidence, including questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and documents. This researcher’s aim was to accurately portray educators’ perceptions of the problem at hand. This triangulation strategy allowed for a solid explanation of the phenomenon and decreases the deficiencies of using a single research strategy. Redfern and Norman (1994) stated that triangulation overcomes the bias of “single method, single observer, single studies; increases confidence in results; and allows divergent results to enrich explanation” (Cronin, 2014).

Participants

Multiple strategies were used to understand educators’ perspectives about teacher retention at an urban middle school, specifically Broome Middle School (BMS). Broome School District (BSD) is a small-city urban school district with approximately 800 students in Grades 6-8. It has been labeled as a focus district by the New York State Department of Education and
has consistently struggled with achievement in ELA and mathematics assessments (New York State Department of Education retrieved from: https://data.nysed.gov). Table 2 describes the student population and demographic changes over the last 10 years. While enrollment has seen a 7% decline, the poverty level of the district has increased 70% since 2006. The minority population is now the majority, with the White population having decreased 26% in the last 10 years.

Table 2

*Changing Demographics of BMS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Demographics</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total enrollment</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>7% decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>40% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>26% decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>70% increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data retrieved from: https://data.nysed.gov

Teacher turnover has been an ongoing concern. In 2005-2006, 27% of the teachers at BMS had fewer than five years of experience, compared to 14% districtwide. In 2015-16, BMS employed 85 teachers, of which 41, or 48%, had fewer than five years of experience. Districtwide numbers are problematic as well, but seem less severe than the middle school turnover rate. In 2005-2006, the district turnover rate was 14%. This increased steadily to 25.5% during the 2015-16 school year. The average 2015-16 turnover rate in New York for teachers with fewer than five years experience was 21% (retrieved from: https://data.nysed.gov). The
data indicates a consistent growth in the turnover rate, especially at the middle school level. At the start of the 2016-17 school year, seven teaching positions at BMS could not filled with certified teachers. These were in the certification areas of special education, science, foreign language, technology, and family and consumer sciences.

According to Latham (2014), participant saturation is reached when additional participants do not provide any additional insights and when you are no longer learning very much from each subsequent interview or observation.

There were three administrators and 77 classroom teachers at BMS, 44 of them having more than 5 years of experience. There were three guidance counselors, two social workers, one behavior specialist, and one school psychologist on staff. The participants were teachers with more than 5 years of experience and three administrators. This researcher provided questionnaires to the veteran staff and administrators, facilitated focus groups by grade level, and interviewed five teachers and administrators in order to provide a credible and insightful look at the challenges at hand.

**Procedures**

Yin (2003) discussed the six most commonly used sources of evidence in case study research: documentation, interviews, archival records, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts. Yin went on to state that there is no advantage from using one source rather than another and that, in fact, two sources may be complementary to each other. Questionnaires, focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and document review were used in this study.
Because this qualitative case study gathered detailed personal information from individuals, this researcher provided a detailed description of the procedures to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This description included full disclosure of potential risks to the people and sites in the study and ways to protect the anonymity of the participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to the institutions, names were masked, and descriptors were limited in order to prevent identification of the participants and the study site (Creswell, 2015). Participants were employed in the same school district as this researcher, therefore it was important to address these perceived imbalances from the very start. As a former colleague and now the administrator responsible for recruiting and supporting new teachers, the nature of this research was one of collaboration: looking for feedback to solve the shared problem of teacher retention, a problem that adversely affected employees at all levels. Hence, it was the intent of this researcher that the work would contribute to and advocate for programs that support teacher retention.

In order to gain access to conduct the qualitative case study, permission was requested from the school district superintendent and the building principal through a letter that detailed the project. This letter described why the site was chosen for the study, what would be accomplished during the study, the amount of time spent at the site, the potential (if any) for disruption, how the results would be used, and what the individuals at the site would gain. It was understood that the research would be conducted with limited disturbances or disruptions and would be performed with respect for all individuals involved. All prospective participants were fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in the research project before they took part in the study. It was understood that individuals may refuse to participate and withdraw at any time with no recriminations. Participation was strictly voluntary.
To begin the study, this researcher asked for time during a building-level faculty meeting to meet with educators with at least 5 years of experience at BMS. At this meeting, the scope of the project was explained and potential participants’ questions were answered. The educators received an unsigned Informed Consent Form, and the Recruitment Letter (Appendix B) to study, consider, and return by a designated date.

**Questionnaires.** Following the meeting, the link to the questionnaire was emailed to the veteran staff at BMS. The questionnaire used in the case study consisted of closed-ended questions, took approximately 25 minutes to complete, and was administered through a secure online survey tool, Survey Monkey. The closed-ended questions provided demographic information about the participants, including age, ethnicity, gender, years of service at BMS, and years of service prior to BMS. The demographic information obtained through closed-ended questions was used to provide descriptive statistics about the study participants. The questionnaire also included scaled questions pertaining to recruitment, career choice, mentor programs, perceived support, and job-related factors, as well as the perceived effect of those factors on teacher retention.

The responses permitted the researcher to begin developing themes for the study (Creswell, 2015). Questionnaires are practical tools through which a large amount of information can be collected in a short period of time; the results are easily quantifiable. Once such data has been quantified, it can be used to compare and contrast with other research and may be used to measure change. According to Creswell (2015), disadvantages include the argument that questionnaires may be inadequate for understanding some forms of information, such as changes of emotions, behavior, and feelings. In addition, there is no way to determine how much thought
a respondent has put into the questions or how to measure differences in interpretation of the questions being asked. Another drawback to this approach is that analyzing open-ended responses may be time consuming.

**One-to-one interviews.** Once the questionnaires were returned, the five participants who responded first were invited to participate in one-to-one interviews. The one-to-one interviews were conducted with five educators who had worked at BMS for five years or more. The Interview Protocol (Appendix D) was used consistently with each participant. The interview questions and responses were recorded in order to have an accurate record of the conversation. In addition to the recording, this researcher took notes during the interview as a backup resource. Fourteen interview questions guided the conversation about perceptions of teacher retention. Probing questions were used to help the researcher elicit additional information, clarify points, and/or obtain a more in-depth explanation.

Yin (2003) stated that one-to-one interviews are considered the “essential source of case study information” (p. 89) because they allow the participant’s true feelings to emerge. They provide insights and the participant’s own causal inferences and explanations (Yin, 2003). This study consisted of interview questions that guided the conversation about perceptions of teacher retention. While one-to-one interviews are time consuming, they provide a valuable method of gaining insight into people's perceptions and contribute to in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2015). The mechanics of an interview can be challenging. In an effort to reduce possible discomfort, this researcher defined the process as a collaborative inquiry in which both researcher and participant were actively engaged in questioning, interpreting, and reporting the
information (Creswell, 2015 p.172). The researcher also must be aware of the potential for response bias and bias due to poorly articulated questions (Yin, 2003).

**Focus groups.** Grade-level focus groups were used to collect a shared understanding from several individuals. Members of the group were allowed to interact and influence each other during the discussion and consideration of ideas and perspectives (Creswell, 2015). Each focus group consisted of four to six individuals who shared a common grade level and worked closely together. These individuals were not the same as the participants in the one-to-one interviews. This researcher elicited responses from all members of each group (Appendix E) and facilitated the process by encouraging all members to take turns talking. The meetings were audio taped for accuracy and then transcribed using the same methods as the one-to-one interviews.

According to Creswell (2015), focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other (p. 217). Group members discover a common language to describe similar experiences and group discussion produces data and insights that could be less accessible without the stimulation of listening to others’ verbalized experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Creswell went on to state that conversation among focus group participants results in discussion data. In this way, focus groups elicit information that helps to combine perspectives and help the researcher fit it all together.

One disadvantage of focus groups is the difficulty of transcribing and recording everyone’s thoughts because so much is occurring (Creswell, 2015). An additional disadvantage of focus groups is the likelihood that they become influenced by one or two dominant people in
the session, biasing the output. The facilitator plays an essential role in handling the situation, ensuring the discussion is not dominated by a few people (Creswell, 2015).

**Documents.** District and building level documents were collected to provide evidence supporting the data collected in the interviews and questionnaires. The data consisted of achievement, attendance, demographic, and discipline data. Some documents were public records that could be found online in resources such as state and regional reports. Additional reports pertaining to teacher statistics, student attendance, and discipline data were pulled directly from the district’s financial and student management systems. The document review was independent of the interview process and ran concurrently during the data collection time frame.

All documents were examined for accuracy, completeness, and usefulness in answering the research questions. Notes were recorded on the information obtained from the documents. For case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate or augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 2003). Documents are ready to analyze without the transcription that is required for other forms of data (Creswell, 2015). They provide a backdrop for the research, help define the problem at hand, and are unobtrusive because they were not created for the case study (Yin, 2003). The disadvantage of using documents is that a plethora of information and numeric data concerning the case study exists; determining what data is best to use without leaving anything out can be difficult.

**Data Analysis**

The closed-ended questions from the questionnaire were presented in a table in order to provide an accurate picture of the sample population. The scaled questions were generated to
guide the conversation during the one-to-one interviews and, therefore, themes were developed and reviewed to look for commonality with those from the interviews.

Data was analyzed in four steps using Creswell’s (2015) methodology. After collecting the data as described in the previous section, all interviews (focus group and one-to-one) were transcribed using InqScribe digital media transcription software to prepare the data for analysis. InqScribe allowed this researcher to slow the pace of the interview and facilitate transcription. This researcher read through the data twice to obtain a general sense of the material and shared transcripts with the participants to confirm accuracy. This conformed to the qualitative standard of member-checking (Creswell, 2015). A member-check, also known as informant feedback or respondent validation, is a technique used to help improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of the information collected. This researcher analyzed the data by reading it several times, adding notes in the margins and conducting an analysis each time. The data was coded by identifying overarching themes. This process located text segments and assigned a code label to them. The data was coded into two primary streams: codes that could be used for descriptive purposes and codes that could be used as themes for the research. MAXQDA was the program used for text analysis. MAXQDA assisted with collecting, organizing, analyzing, visualizing, and publishing the data from the qualitative research.

The qualitative process of data analysis consists of iterative phases that cycle between data collection and analysis. Table 3 details the process for analyzing interview transcripts (Saldana, 2012).
Table 3

Steps for *Analyzing Transcripts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Coding process</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Initial reading of transcripts</td>
<td>After all tape recorded interviews are transcribed, the researcher reviews the data several times before developing a preliminary list of categories, themes and patterns. Each theme is given an initial code. Member-check occurs simultaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Organization and coding responses</td>
<td>Responses will be sorted and grouped by research question. The researcher reads through all responses for each question and develops a master coding list of response categories. Frequency of responses is tracked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Total transcript review and final coding</td>
<td>Coding list is finalized, working off list developed in Step 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Completion of data analysis</td>
<td>The analysis of each response to questions and analysis of each interview transcript is conducted. Themes, patterns, and categories for the research questions are confirmed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

It is important to respect the participants and the site where research is taking place (Creswell, 2015). This began with explaining the purpose of the study to the gatekeepers and all potential participants, as well as how the results would be used and the impact the study may have on everyone involved. The flow of the day-to-day life at the school saw little interruption. This researcher talked briefly at a regular faculty meeting about the research, recruiting participants and leaving information for the potential participants to review on their own. All
data, including questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews, was collected before or after school hours.

This researcher ensured that confidential information was protected and the anonymity of the participants was preserved. This was done to ensure the integrity of the research, open communication with research participants, and protect sensitive information obtained during the process (Roberts, 2010). To protect the privacy of participants, the following measures ensured each participant’s anonymity (Sieber, 1992):

- Names were not used in transcribing from the audio tape or in writing up the case study.
  Each person was assigned a letter name.
- All identifying characteristics, such as school, city, and ethnic background, were changed.
- The audio tapes were reviewed only in the researcher’s home.
- The tapes and notes will be destroyed after the report of this research has been accepted by the university.

This researcher was the assistant superintendent for the school district, second to the superintendent in the district chain of command. These teachers or principals did not report directly to this researcher. This researcher was not the immediate supervisor of the teachers or the administrative team. This researcher believed participants would be open in telling their stories because they believed that this researcher could change the things that they believed need to be changed at their school. The informed consent ensured that participants understood there would not be any adverse consequences for declining or withdrawing from participation. Everyone had the right to refuse participation and anonymity was protected and guaranteed by this researcher.
Credibility. The richness of case studies is related to the amount of detail and contextualization that is possible when a small number of focal cases and issues are analyzed. This researcher was able to provide a compelling and engaging profile of the case, with examples and linkages to broader issues. Purposeful random sampling provided credibility to the research without advanced knowledge of the outcomes. The purpose of this sampling was to increase credibility rather than to foster representativeness (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The goal of using primarily open-ended questions was to have the participants reconstruct their experiences within the topic under study. Creswell (2015) advised researchers to use multiple approaches to ensure the credibility of the research. This researcher employed the following strategies to check and validate the accuracy of findings, following the guidance of Guba & Lincoln (1989):

1. Thick description. This researcher sought to understand the problem at hand by delving into the thoughts of educators at an urban middle school. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Tracy (2014) stated that one of the most important means for achieving credibility in qualitative research is thick description. This involves providing enough detail to the readers. It is described by Lincoln and Guba (1989) as a way of achieving a type of external validity and transferability.

2. Member-checking. This researcher provided the participants a copy of their transcribed interviews. Thus, participants took active roles in reviewing their own data.
According to Lincoln and Guba (1989), member-checks are “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility,” (p. 314) because they allow the research participants to check, verify, and/or further elaborate on their interview responses.

3. **Triangulation.** This researcher used different data sources to support the work, including questionnaires, focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and documents. This technique was used to ensure that the account was comprehensive and well-developed. Triangulation was used to check the consistency of findings generated by review of the different data (Saldana, 2013).

**Self-reflexivity and transparency.** The researcher has immense responsibility in qualitative research. Data is analyzed through the researcher’s lens; therefore, the ability to manage one’s own personal bias is crucial to the outcome of the research. It is important as a researcher to understand that preconceptions and points of view provide both strengths and weaknesses in the endeavor (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). As a subjective undertaking, the researcher’s background, experiences, and assumptions can color the perception of the case studied and shape interpretations. Stake (1995) explained, “subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding” (p. 45).

As K-12 educators we consistently study patterns of achievement for the distinct subgroups of students we educate. Not only may we make the mistake of studying subgroups as if they were homogenous in nature, we often compare these subgroups to what is considered the norm and use the label *deficit* (Parsons, 2008) to describe subgroups performing below the normal. Research of this type utilizes the White middle class as the normal. Such differences often translate into deficits in the education of diverse children (Jupp & Slattery, 2006), with
genetics, culture, or families as potential reasons for such deficits. Hence, teachers’ deficit thinking and lack of understanding of the diverse population do not provide accessibility and opportunities for underserved students.

To work toward a neutral position, the researcher continually reflected on her practices and research. This researcher used the critical lens of being open minded and skeptical of the data at hand (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). Being objective means writing with curiosity rather than with a preset opinion. As an employee of the research site, this researcher was familiar with the setting, including the organizational structure, climate, and the current strategic change initiatives being examined. This knowledge provided an opportunity for greater understanding of the case, along with access to documents and employees for gathering data. However, this researcher must also acknowledge this subjectivity and monitor interpretations and conclusions for bias. To address this concern, this researcher took steps to increase accuracy by asking colleagues in the field who were not employed by the district to review the coding, data collection, and conclusions. A neutral colleague’s review of the work can note things this researcher may miss or can identify gaps in the argument that need to be addressed (Saldana, 2013, Stake, 1995).

Limitations

While every effort is made to ensure a quality research study, limitations need to be considered. First, this research study was limited by the selection of participants from one urban middle school. Therefore, the data gathered is limited to the responses obtained from this single school. As this study centers on educational conditions within this relatively small arena, the implications of the findings should be considered informational, used to guide district policy makers. While the findings of this study can inform research related to teacher retention in urban
middle schools, the results may be of limited value beyond New York, where the study took place.

In addition, the participants in this study were limited to teachers with at least five years of experience and a small number of administrators. The study looked at their perspectives, thoughts, and reflections. Thus, the information provided was not necessarily the same as the real-time lived information that might be obtained from new hires in the midst of their first years.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to describe the qualitative research methodologies utilized in the study. Qualitative case study research was chosen because the goal of this research was to understand current educators’ perceptions of teacher retention at an urban middle school. Case studies provide fertile grounds for conceptual and theoretical development and for applying existing theories to complex day-to-day realities. Districts need to consider what specific features in communities like BMS mediate teachers’ choices and whether teachers choose to go to urban schools in order to positively affect student learning. Urban school recruiters need to pay close attention during the hiring process and ask questions like: “Does the nature and level of urban experiences of the candidates matter?” The richness of the data could help generate new thinking and new ideas. The case study method was used to reveal the factors that have kept these teachers at their urban school and provide insights to similar districts as they work to retain their teachers.

Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

This qualitative case study explored educator perceptions of teacher retention at Broom Middle (BMS). This chapter presents an analysis of themes derived from the data retrieved from
documentation review and qualitative research. The data was collected from a single site, a small-city middle school in a community in the northeastern the United States. Data included 10 years of demographic and attendance trends, aggregate state assessment scores, and discipline records. In addition, the experiences and interpretations of veteran teachers about teacher retention were documented by collecting data from faculty. This information was analyzed based on the triangulation of data received from three sources:

- an anonymous electronic questionnaire,
- one-to-one interviews, and
- grade-level focus group interviews.

Interview data was collected to provide insights on the research question posed in the study: How do stakeholders in an urban middle school perceive the challenges and opportunities associated with teacher retention?

Participants

The study was described during a BMS faculty meeting and participants were recruited after the meeting. Of the 48 veteran teachers at BMS, 24 (50%) responded to the anonymous 10-question electronic survey. All of the respondents were White; 17 identified themselves as female and seven were male. Eighteen of these veteran teachers had teaching experience prior to Broome Middle School, and 14 of the 24 educators surveyed did not have a mentor when they first started at Broome.

In total, 14 veteran teachers took part in the one-to-one and focus group interviews. Of these 14 teachers, 10 were lifelong community residents who had attended the school system as students, gone away to college, and returned to the district to teach.
Five teachers, 2 females and 3 males, participated in the individual interviews. The middle-school teacher experience for these participants ranged from seven to 27 years. All but one developed the passion to teach in high school or earlier, knowing they wanted to become teachers but not particularly sure of the subject or grade level. The lone teacher who indicated that he did not have the passion to enter teaching while still in school had worked in the private sector before moving to education. The two teachers with the fewest years of experience had formal mentor support at the middle school, while the others did not have mentors when they first started teaching in the building.

Three focus group interviews were conducted with grade-level teams. The Grade 6 focus group consisted of three female teachers, with 11, 13, and 16 years of experience at the middle school. All three had developed their passion and desire for teaching early on as teenagers. The Grade 7 focus group consisted of three female teachers, with 10, 11, and 16 years of experience at the middle school. Only one knew in high school that she wanted to become a teacher. The two with more experience had previous careers in the private sector; they stated that they lacked fulfillment in those careers and decided to pursue teaching certification. The Grade 8 focus group consisted of three females, with 9, 14, and 16 years of experience at the middle school.

Each of the Grade 8 teachers had a different story of how she entered the teaching profession. Becoming a teacher never occurred to the teacher with nine years experience until she started tutoring friends in college and realized she thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The teacher with 14 years experience worked in the private sector for a number of years; she said she left because the job lacked fulfillment and she could not see herself working there for the rest of her life. The third teacher substituted in this district for 14 years before obtaining her
certification. Only the focus group participants with 11 or fewer years of experience had been assigned mentors when they were hired.

When asked to describe their first years teaching at the middle school, all but one teacher described the experience as challenging and not what they had expected. They indicated that while they were confident in the content of what they were teaching, they struggled with classroom management issues and were surprised by the varying needs of the students. A lot of time was spent during their first years working on differentiation strategies as well as developing classroom management and behavior protocols. One teacher in the Grade 7 focus group stated:

I struggled my first year. It was a shock going from everything that I learned in college to being in my first placement for my first job. I struggled with the behaviors, planning and learning how to deal with our diverse population. College did not prepare me for all that teaching encompasses.

The one teacher who described the experience differently had teaching experience in New York City, so coming to Broome Middle School was less challenging and she found the transition to be an easy one.

**Building Level Data**

Building demographic data is indicative of the changing face of the entire district and is shared in Figure 1. The changes in the BMS population from the 2006-07 school year to 2016-17, the last officially reported year, are cited. The Latino population increased 50% and the economically disadvantaged percentage increased by 34% during the 10-year span. Attendance data remained relatively consistent at 92% over the 10-year span. The annual attendance rate is
determined by dividing the school’s total actual attendance by the total possible attendance for a school year.

Broome Middle School assessment scores for the last three years was roughly 30 percent below the state average for both the English language arts (ELA) and mathematics state assessments. Tables 4 and 5 compare both ELA and mathematics for the last 3 years.

Table 4

3 Year BMS vs State ELA Assessments Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>in percents</th>
<th>2016-17 BMS % Proficient</th>
<th>2016-17 State % Proficient</th>
<th>2015-16 BMS % Proficient</th>
<th>2015-16 State % Proficient</th>
<th>2014-15 BMS % Proficient</th>
<th>2014-15 State % Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

3 Year BMS vs State Math Assessments Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>in percents</th>
<th>2016-17 BMS % Proficient</th>
<th>2016-17 State % Proficient</th>
<th>2015-16 BMS % Proficient</th>
<th>2015-16 State % Proficient</th>
<th>2014-15 BMS % Proficient</th>
<th>2014-15 State % Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data regarding violent or disruptive incidents, as well as incidents of discrimination, harassment, bullying, and cyberbullying, are compiled to comply with state reporting requirements and to designate schools that are persistently dangerous. All public schools are
required to document incidents occurring on school property, including incidents occurring in or on a school bus and at school functions. This violent and disruptive incident (VADIR) and Dignity for All Student Act (DASA) data is reported annually. Table 6 provides an overview of the incident data at BMS for the period 2014-2017.

Table 6

*BMS Discipline Incidents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMS Reported Discipline Incidents</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2014-15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of VADIR incidents</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of DASA incidents</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questionnaire results.** The anonymous survey results gauged opinions about various building-level issues, thereby adding credibility to the research as the researcher continued with one-to-one and focus group interviews. Figure 2 shows the results of the 5 point Likert Scale question asking “how do you perceive the following factors as influencing a teacher’s decision to stay at Broome Middle School as an educator?”

School leadership was cited by 92% of the respondents as influencing or significantly influencing a teacher’s decision to remain at the middle school. Addressing middle school student behavior followed at 83.33%. Teacher autonomy was third with 75%, and the extent to which a teacher felt able to help students learn and succeed was cited as a factor by 71% of those taking the survey. Resources and facilities were considered influencing factors by 67% of the respondents. District location and parent engagement shared the same number of responses, with just over 54% each. Formal collegial support rounded out the majority responses at 50%.
Table 7

Factors Perceived to Influence a Teacher’s Decision to Stay at BMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NO INFLUENCE AT ALL</th>
<th>MINIMAL INFLUENCE</th>
<th>INFLUENCED</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCED</th>
<th>Influenced + Significantly Influenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
<td>4.17% 1</td>
<td>4.17% 1</td>
<td>29.17% 7</td>
<td>62.50% 15</td>
<td>91.67% 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing middle School Student Behavior</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
<td>8.33% 2</td>
<td>8.33% 2</td>
<td>25.00% 6</td>
<td>58.33% 14</td>
<td>83.33% 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Autonomy</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
<td>8.33% 2</td>
<td>16.67% 4</td>
<td>41.67% 10</td>
<td>33.33% 8</td>
<td>75% 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which a teacher feels capable to help students learn and succeed</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
<td>8.33% 2</td>
<td>20.83% 5</td>
<td>45.83% 11</td>
<td>25.00% 6</td>
<td>70.83% 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources &amp; Facilities</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
<td>4.17% 1</td>
<td>29.17% 7</td>
<td>20.83% 5</td>
<td>45.83% 11</td>
<td>66.66% 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Location</td>
<td>12.50% 3</td>
<td>8.33% 2</td>
<td>25.00% 6</td>
<td>33.33% 8</td>
<td>20.83% 5</td>
<td>54.17% 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Engagement</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
<td>12.50% 3</td>
<td>33.33% 8</td>
<td>41.67% 10</td>
<td>12.50% 3</td>
<td>54.17% 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Collegial Support including PLC's &amp; mentoring</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
<td>12.50% 3</td>
<td>37.50% 9</td>
<td>45.83% 11</td>
<td>4.17% 1</td>
<td>50% 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Collegial Supports</td>
<td>4.17% 1</td>
<td>12.50% 3</td>
<td>37.50% 9</td>
<td>25.00% 6</td>
<td>20.83% 5</td>
<td>45.83% 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Practices</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
<td>16.67% 4</td>
<td>41.67% 10</td>
<td>33.33% 8</td>
<td>8.33% 2</td>
<td>41.66% 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Size</td>
<td>8.33% 2</td>
<td>29.17% 7</td>
<td>29.17% 7</td>
<td>20.83% 5</td>
<td>12.50% 3</td>
<td>33.33% 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Practices</td>
<td>20.83% 5</td>
<td>29.17% 7</td>
<td>29.17% 7</td>
<td>16.67% 4</td>
<td>4.17% 1</td>
<td>20.84% 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Informal collegial supports and teacher practices garnered just under the 50% mark, with 11 and 10 responses respectively. District size was an influencing factor for 33.33% of the respondents, while recruitment practices seemed to least influence teachers’ decisions to stay: approximately 21% of the respondents indicated that this factor influenced or significantly influenced a teacher’s decision to remain at Broome.
Figure 2 portrays answers to the question “What are the three things that you feel contributed most to teacher turnover at BMS in the last 5 years?” The chart categorizes these responses by school leadership, district systems, and teacher efficacy.

![Bar chart showing number of responses per category for what the school and/or district can do to retain teachers in the middle school.](image)

*Figure 2. Perceptions of turnover factors as cited in questionnaire*

Of the 72 responses, 44 (61%) were tied to school leadership. As Table 8 shows, the lack of administrative support was described in some instances and simply stated in others. Fourteen (19%) of the responses were associated with district or system level concerns. Seven (just under 10%) of the responses were tied to teacher or student concerns, respectively. The last question of the survey was answered by 23 of the 24 survey takers.

Comments under the improved teacher support category include teachers need to be valued and supported and teachers need to be respected and treated as professionals by administrators. Following the code of conduct was cited several times in the consistency with
Table 8

Reported Factors Contributing to BMS Teacher Turnover

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Leadership</th>
<th>District Systems</th>
<th>Teacher Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Turnover</td>
<td>14 Teacher Evaluation System</td>
<td>1 Lack Sense of Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Administrative Support for Teachers: lack of respect for teachers - taking students' words over teachers' explanations</td>
<td>Number of initiatives and lack of continued support for them</td>
<td>7 Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Administrative Support: lack of consequences &amp; follow through for student behavior</td>
<td>7 Salary</td>
<td>3 Teacher Decision Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Administrative Support: no other explanation</td>
<td>6 Lack of resources</td>
<td>2 Personal Reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Administrative Support: sense of administration vs. staff culture prevails</td>
<td>2 Lack of staff</td>
<td>1 Other opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Leadership: no other explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Administrative Support: lack of holding students accountable for their actions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL: 44 TOTAL: 14 TOTAL: 7

student behavior category, along with the recommendation that discipline needs to be consistent and timely for all students. Teacher training included recommendations for team-building activities, training on cultural responsiveness, and training on mental health issues. Scheduling and systems recommendations included returning sixth graders to elementary school, staggering the bell schedule, and adding additional hall monitors. Another recommendation was that secretaries, not teachers, should make attendance calls when a student is absent.

Themes Identified

Three major themes emerged from the data analysis.
Strong *School leadership* is important to teacher retention. Administrative turnover, administrator support of teachers with discipline issues, and mutual trust and respect between administration and staff were mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews.

*Increasing teacher efficacy* is the second major theme discovered through data analysis. 

*Increasing teacher efficacy* through informal and formal supports was considered imperative to a teacher’s success. Educators focused specifically on new teacher support, discussing the need for new teachers to be supported with various training, including understanding the community and its population. Teacher autonomy was an important subtheme. It was considered important at both the classroom and the building level.

Table 9

*Case Study Themes and Subthemes*

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*District systems* is the third theme identified. It includes policies, processes, and procedures driven by the state, district, or building leadership. Subthemes include scheduling, the teacher evaluation system and the number of new initiatives and their follow through. Themes and subthemes are portrayed in Table 9.
School Leadership

Participants overwhelmingly agreed on the need for building leadership to provide support for teachers. Within this support by building-level leaders, emerging subthemes included: Administrative turnover, Student discipline follow through, and Trust and respect.

Administrative turnover. All participants said that the building-level leadership was experienced, supportive, and offered advice and guidance when they were first hired. All 14 educators said the leadership and collegial support they received contributed to their wanting to stay and helped them grow more confident in their practices. One focus group participant stated:

It’s like a student, you don't remember the lesson but I remember the feeling. I remember it was a good feeling and I got hired very quickly. And I remember one day the assistant principal came in my classroom, sat down next to me and asked my opinion about block scheduling. I remember that as being very supportive and the fact that she cared what I thought meant a lot. So, I felt really supported in the first few years that I was here.

The leadership was stable for many years until 2009. This was when administrative turnover became problematic, according to those interviewed. Broome Middle School’s leadership team had seen many changes in the past eight years. Specifically, since 2009-2010, there were seven building principals. One interviewee stated:

I think the big changes in administration without the stability has really caused a lot of people who have been here for a long time to be a little more distrusting of administration. It's not as comfortable as it used to be.
Another stated: “Each new administrator wants to put their own twist on things and the inconsistency is tough.” In regards to the changing administration, one Grade 8 focus group participant stated:

We all wonder if they are here to stay, are they really invested in us, are they just using us as a stepping stone, are we just experience for them? It’s hard, you’re not sure how to feel about them and how they feel about being here. So it’s hard to develop that trust.

A Grade 6 focus group teacher added:

When I first started, I felt 100% supported, encouraged, appreciated. With the high turnover in administration in the last few years in our building, it’s been difficult and I feel a divide, you know, and it’s hard to figure out where that, how that divide came about. I don’t feel like it’s a cohesive unit anymore and that's frustrating and sad.

Student discipline follow through. Much conversation focused on following the building code of conduct and the need for consistent consequences for the students. All of the focus groups had conversations regarding student behavior, the perception that consequences were not consistent, and that teachers were not always supported when an incident was reported. Three of the five individuals interviewed also talked about support with student discipline. One eighth grade focus group member talked about a student cursing incident. A student cursed at the teacher and there were no consequences for the student. When the same student cursed at an administrator, a consequence followed. In this teacher’s mind: “A curse is a curse regardless of who the adult is.” A sixth grade focus group member said:

And I think back in the day it seemed like if there was an issue that came up, the administrators would back us. Where now, it’s, okay, let’s investigate. Let’s hear what all
the kids have to say. And let’s question the teachers. And really, I think that is the lack of trust.

One interviewee recognized a divide in perceptions within the building. He stated:

A theme I’ve realized over the years is that every situation is different, I know there’s different penalties and there’s different punishments and that suspensions and punishing are not the answer. That's what research is showing. So we have a line here where I think some people feel a certain way about being disrespected and the behaviors are really taxing on them. On the other hand, there is some staff who understands the need to stay calm and use the skills in our toolboxes. You’ll be able to de-escalate anything, save face, and not worry about other kids in your class by doing this.

A seventh grade focus group member repeated that discipline and behaviors were major issues at the middle school. The teacher discussed the need for proactivity rather than reactivity and felt they needed more support from the building leadership when dealing with behaviors.

An eighth grade teacher talked about follow through with taking cell phones away from students that then was not backed up by the leadership. She stated:

I feel like you expect us to do something and we do it and then you don’t support us.

Then, when it comes up again, I’m not going to do it anymore because it doesn’t get resolved. It can be frustrating.

This teacher used a coaching example:

You need your best player to win. But if they’re disrespectful and they do something that makes the whole entire team look silly, you’ve got to make an example out of this player. If you make an example out of this player, the others see that coach is sitting our best
player and the rest of them are going to think if she does this to the best player, she would
definitely do it to me as well.

**Trust and respect.** Trust and respect were repeatedly mentioned when discussing
administrative support. “No disrespect to the new administration. They just need to set up camp,
get comfortable with the staff, let the staff build their trust again, and blossom” was stated by one
seventh grade focus group member. This focus group discussed trust and respect as well. One
teacher stated:

> I only went to my administrators if actually necessary. Usually, it was after going to a
colleague who didn’t know the answer. The trust in our administration, there really
wasn’t any. I never knew how long they would stay. I knew more information than they
did, about the way the building worked. I'm not saying, you know, they obviously know
different things than I know. But they didn’t necessarily know how the building worked,
about our community or our families. I didn’t rely on my administration.

In dealing with parents, that participant added: “And that trust, so that when you go into a parent
meeting, if you have a high intensity situation, you don't know if you have that support. You
don't feel supported.”

A teacher in the sixth grade focus group stated: “I don’t feel like we’re a family here
anymore. I don’t, I just don’t feel that trust. I think everybody’s always looking over their
shoulder and being judged.” Another said:

> And I think back in the day it seemed like if there was an issue that came up, the
administrators would back us. Where now, it’s, we have to investigate. Let’s hear what all
the kids have to say. And let’s question the teachers. And really, I think that it boils down
to lack of trust.

**Increasing Teacher Efficacy**

Building leadership’s support for teachers was repeated several times under the *School leadership* theme. The theme of teacher supports also emerges under the theme *Increasing teacher efficacy*, within which are the following subthemes: *Informal supports, Formal supports, New teacher supports,* and *Teacher autonomy.*

**Informal supports.** Overwhelmingly, all of the educators stated that collegial support contributed to their decision to stay at the middle school. “The very first thing that made me want to stay was the faculty.” said one teacher interviewed. A seventh grade teacher said:

What kept me was the support of the people around me. Not just the people helping out with the curriculum, how to teach the curriculum, what works, what doesn’t work, in their PLCs or something like that, but also the rest of the staff. Because I can learn from any kind of teacher here.

Building relationships with co-workers outside of school was mentioned frequently as being important. One participant said:

You can build friends and have relationships outside of work and do things like that. I think relationships keep people here. If they don’t form relationships, you know the tie, then they don’t feel bad if they leave or they don’t have any feeling of it.

An eighth grade teacher said:

I remember one of the biggest mistakes I made my first year, was I basically just locked myself in my room, and used any free time I had planning, and staying ahead of what was
going on in the classroom. I remember some of the older teachers telling me I was going to burn myself out and needed some down time. I didn't realize that taking 30 minutes to go talk with a colleague about a basketball game that was on TV the night before could just kind of clear my head and give me the energy to come back and actually be better the next period.

A teacher on the eighth grade focus team had a unique experience because she taught at the middle school for a number of years, left for a year due to a family transfer, and then returned the previous year. She said:

At the end of the day, it's still a working environment and we all work together. The teachers are one of the main reasons why I was yearning to come back to this district because I remember that camaraderie among staff and administrators. It was and is one of the most important things.

The sixth grade team spoke highly of the team support they shared. One of the participants stated:

I think it's the staff that is keeping the teachers here right now. You know, the bonds that we've shared and the support we have for each other is one of the main reasons, I believe.

You know, when you don't feel supported or you don't feel very positive, that's unfortunately why people tend, I believe, to look elsewhere.

Another said:

I would say if you don't have supportive colleagues and people that you can go to and talk about anything, whether it's school or it's home, or whatever issue it is, I think that
that’s the biggest thing. You know, we have the sixth grade, we eat together, we’re there for each other. I mean, we’re a very, very supportive grade level.

Because 10 of the 14 teachers interviewed were former students in the district, there were several specific references to working with teachers and administrators they had as students. While nervous at first, each teacher indicated that the support of the veteran educators was crucial to their success. One teacher said:

It was interesting because a lot of them were teachers that I had had coming to school here. So that was, I don’t want to say intimidating, but maybe just kind of... It was odd, When I was a 21-year-old kid, to ask advice to somebody who I literally had as a teacher or leader seven years prior. It seemed like everyone was willing to help, understanding that we’ve all been in that situation.

Another said:

When I first started, I was still living at home. My mother lives less than five minutes from this building, so that was great. It was the veteran teachers that were still here when I started, and many of them were my teachers, that helped me move along. If I was feeling stressed, they would tell me that it was okay, and walk me through whatever it was on my mind at the time.

A seventh grade teacher talked about the need for support with this story about her principal:

I think the number one, actually the two top things that really helped me out a lot, was when I asked my colleagues for help. They were there to help me out and, secondly, I felt the confidence from our building principal at the time. He had confidence in me and I
know I had his backing. He knew that I was somebody who took care of business on my own, so if I needed help with something, then he’d back me up. Over the first couple years I had my first child and he even sent me a card at my house, with congratulations on my first baby. I felt very welcome and very well supported by him and my colleagues. An eighth grade focus group teacher summed it up by saying:

I think the most important thing that needs to happen is for teachers to feel supported, appreciated, and for all of us (administrators, teachers, aides, etc) to work together as a team. I believe if teachers felt supported and appreciated then the whole climate of the school would change. I truly hope one day this will happen.

**Formal supports.** Formal supports found in this study included the district mentoring program and professional learning communities (PLCs). The district mentoring program was established after state legislation requiring teacher mentoring for certification went into effect. District documents indicated that mentoring is a two-year experience. In the first year, all teachers are assigned a one-to-one mentor for support. The district mentor coordinator is a teacher leader who matches trained mentors with the new hires, trying first to match teachers within the same discipline and building. When this is not an option, matches may need to occur across grade levels and departments. The second year of the program is set up to support the cohort of new teachers from the previous year. Professional development transitions into a group focus, addressing needs shared by the teachers in their second year. These needs are determined with data from interviews and surveys performed by the district mentor coordinator.

All of the teachers interviewed believed that the mentoring program was an important element for teacher retention. Two of the 14 teachers were currently mentors in the district. In
order to become a mentor, teachers must go through an application process and take part in a two-day summer training. After that, yearly refreshers are offered to all mentors who were assigned mentees for that year. Both of these teachers believed that mentoring offers a built-in connection to a staff member. Having an assigned mentor eliminates the first problem of who can answer questions.

Mentoring also had a reciprocal nature. One mentor described this characteristic by stating:

I’ve been a mentor the past few years and I think it’s very important. This year, my mentee is my mentor for the new technology because I’m an old geezer and he’s pretty young, so he helps me with that. But I also helped him when he first got here. He didn’t have enough desks and he didn’t know who to ask. So, it’s important to just have that person to talk to to know who to go to for the information.

Access to one’s mentor was coded in the analysis as well. While all felt having a mentor was important, it was also important to have someone in the same building and preferably the same discipline as a mentor. One seventh grade focus group member stated:

I had a mentor. She was at the neighboring elementary school. She was a phenomenal teacher and helped me with whoever she could. However, she wasn’t in this building. She was a fifth grade teacher, so it was very close in grade level and she would come over here or I would go over there and talk to her. But again, she wasn’t in the building, so she didn’t know all the in the building-level processes. I felt like I fell back on my team more than my mentor because they were here, they were with me, they were with me all day,
they knew the procedures and everything. So I felt like my team guided me a little bit more than my mentor...even though she was great.

Another teacher stated that her mentor was in the same building and department and that the mentor did help quite a bit. She went on to say:

But it’s not that I just went to that one person, it was never that. It’s still not that. I mean, I’m 11th year, and I still go to everybody around me, whether they’ve been here for longer than I have or even less, and I use them as resources, probably more than anything.

The need for additional mentors was noted, and four teachers stated that they should step up to become mentors. One teacher who had been there 11 years said she should step up as a mentor but worried, “I don’t know if I could do that. I don’t know if I have all the answers.”

While one eighth grade teacher had a mentor from a different department, she found her extremely helpful. Specifically, she stated:

I taught special education and she was an ELA teacher. There wasn’t really much correlation between what we taught, but she was a good mentor. She was someone I could trust and ask questions to. She was always there when I needed her so that was helpful. For example, I was having issues with my aides, because I was a 25-year-old employee and I had aides in my room who were in their 50s. So it was like I had my mother in my room. It was kind of like how do I manage these people if I needed to and stuff? She walked me through many scenarios when we met.

In addition to the district mentoring program, professional learning communities (PLCs) provided time for teachers to meet as a grade level or department to review student work, curriculum pieces, and teaching strategies. PLCs were implemented in the district three years
prior. One sixth grade focus team member stated, “PLCs offer time to be together with colleagues that are teaching the same things and trying to stay on the same page and getting new ideas in a non-threatening way from your colleagues that are equal to you.” She went on to say:

I think that has been really the single thing, for me, now after 30 years, I don't really like people to tell me how I should do things. But if I hear my colleague and something's working for them, I’ll take everything they have to offer. And, that's great. I'll try that, I’ll try that. I tend to take more from a colleague then I would any place else.”

An eighth grade teacher shared similar thoughts: “We don’t feel judged in our PLC. For example, I might share that I cannot get these kids to write a conclusion and ask what the others are doing. It doesn’t feel forced and it’s very easy.”

One problem cited repeatedly was that PLCs were not available to everyone. This can be due to scheduling issues or due to the fact that there may not be multiple teachers for every subject area. Teachers teaching at different grade levels may only be able to meet with a PLC for one of the grade levels they are teaching. One eighth grade special education teacher had a PLC with seventh grade math teachers. She believed she would have been frustrated with this if she had not been already comfortable with her eighth grade curriculum and the support of her aides.

New teacher supports. While many of the items discussed above fall under new teacher supports as well as teacher supports in general, this researcher coded new teacher supports separately because it came up several times without prompting. Being able to support new teachers as they entered a high-poverty, diverse middle school was emphasized as important. Providing supports and strategies specifically to the new hires regarding culturally relevant teaching and supporting English language learners and special education students was mentioned
several times. One special area teacher talked about what it would be like to be in a new teacher’s shoes as they came to Broome. She said:

If you’re not from this community or you’re not familiar with the type of students that we’re teaching, I would think that right away it’s kind of a shock and there needs to be training with that. I really do think that we do a good job in Amsterdam, we talk about all the things that are affecting our school, ACES, trauma and all the other things, but it's constant professional development for the type of student we have.

Another teacher said:

New teachers need to know what they’re getting into by coming into our district. They need to understand the community, know the background and understand where these kids are coming from. It’s not just a job, it’s our life now. Knowing where these kids come from and the struggles they have can be a shock to some of these people coming in.

Three teachers talked about new teachers being hesitant to write students up for behavioral concerns. One teacher talked about an incident when a student was written up for cursing in her class. She stated that she had been questioned by a building leader who asked whether it really happened. She stated, “How can I benefit from making something up like that? Why would I? But I am afraid that the new teachers are very much afraid to use our disciplinary code because they do get questioned like that.” She went on to suggest that the leadership think of the new teachers in the same way that the teachers think of their students. She said, “As teachers we complement the kid for being on task and doing a good job. Why can’t that happen for the new teachers to show the kids this teacher is supported and important to our building?”
Additional classroom management and escalation strategies tailored specifically for new teachers were also suggested. One special area teacher stated, “New teachers need to know how to engage and disengage. They need to be able to have training on de-escalation.” The veteran teachers empathized with the new teachers’ dilemma. As veterans they understood the basics of teaching but still did not have enough time to do what needs to be done. One teacher said:

I just feel like the traditional model of the teachers teach and the administrators take care of discipline is done. It’s overwhelming to all when we are asked if we called the parents, and did we follow up, and do we have our I can statements on the board, etc. If it’s overwhelming to me and I have my lessons pretty well down, I wonder what it is doing to the newest hires. It has to be stressful.

**Teacher autonomy.** Teacher autonomy included not only teacher control over what happens in the classroom but also their input into building-level conversations and decisions. Simply put, one eighth grade teacher said, “When we hire this professional, we need to give them that trust and the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them. We need to empower them and reach out for their help… You know what I mean?” Another said, “It is important to be involved, I think, right away with the decision making process. Our current principal is doing a wonderful job of that by bringing people in and really having their ideas heard.” He went on to say that he believed it is often simply miscommunication that contributes to why teachers may think their autonomy is being taken away. In actuality, the real problem may have been the way the information was communicated.

The seventh grade focus group talked about the satisfaction they had when they were feeling accomplished and their work was making a difference. “People want to stay because they
can see their work is being useful,” was what one seventh grade teacher said. One sixth grade teacher talked about how in the past, the teachers had input on the master schedule. She went on to say that this was now happening again and was excited about the prospect because this building principal was reaching out to all staff and working to rebuild collaborative relationships on programmatic pieces.

The sixth grade team talked about feeling part of a student’s success. Specifically, one said:

I think being part of the solution, being part of something is the most important thing. In a school with a hundred people, the manager or the administration can do that, but you also need to do that for yourself, too. Or in our little segments here, every day is a, I don’t mean to sound negative, but every day is a new problem To be part of the solution on a daily basis to help these kids, I think, drives me to keep coming back. Because they need us.

District Systems

The theme District systems includes building, local, community, state, and national frameworks, initiatives, policies, and protocols. This theme casts a wide net, covering areas that may have been handed down to the buildings from another source. It includes processes for rolling out initiatives in the building and their potential effect on teacher retention as well as day-to-day practices. Subthemes include: Scheduling, the Teacher evaluation system, and New initiatives.

Scheduling. Scheduling was cited in a number of different ways during the interviews. A new system of scheduling students placed students in houses. The purpose of a house is to instill
the sense of a smaller community within the school. Three teachers felt that the new system of houses had made it more difficult to communicate because the houses did not necessarily have all the same students. According to that teacher:

We don’t all have the same kids now so it’s kind of like all of these different people coming in. Teaming was good not only for the kids, but I also think teaming was good for the teachers. We had common kids we could meet on and discuss.

Teachers also cited the lack of administrative access during the day. This could be because all administrators and support staff were busy in a Child Study Team meeting or because the administrators were busy performing the required teacher evaluations. Suggestions were made to be sure that there was always access to one or two administrative or guidance supports at any time during the day.

**Teacher evaluation system:** The state-led Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) not only required administrators to spend more time on teacher evaluations than they had ever done in the past, but it also presented challenges by tying teacher evaluation ratings to student test scores. While this particular piece was in hiatus through 2019, strong sentiments existed regarding the evaluation process and what it did to climate and atmosphere. One teacher stated:

I feel as if the administrators are judging me. It was very difficult because as teachers, we have no repercussions. If you did say anything to the administration, they could use it against you and your job could be on the line. It also was very hurtful to be judged by people who perhaps weren’t even in a classroom. Perhaps they had been a gym teacher
and they’re the ones who are making judgments on how you should run a classroom
without having any experience.

Similar sentiments were shared by another teacher, who stated:

So I think APPR changed it a lot where we don’t feel we have the respect or the same
camaraderie with the leadership that we used to have. In their defense though, they’re just
doing their jobs. And I know for a fact that a principal did an evaluation of a teacher and
told the teacher he was perfect but that a perfect score could not be given since growth
needed to be shown. I wish it could go back to the way it was.”

One of the same focus group members had a softer approach to dealing with the changed system,
saying:

Things change and we have to change with them. And those changes are difficult. People
are now being held responsible when maybe we weren’t responsible for before. But I
really think that, with support, it’ll be okay. The support piece is huge. There was
definitely a shift when the changes in evaluation happened and I don’t know if you can
really blame anyone. It’s just the way it is and the continued support is what we need to
get through it by working together.

A third teacher stated that APPR had actually quieted teachers who would normally share best
practices. Worried as to how advice would be seen, at faculty meetings for example, teachers
would choose not to say anything.

**New initiatives.** While specific initiatives were not cited, it appeared that most teachers
understood the purposes of the initiatives that were started and many felt as if there was not
enough support in getting them underway. One seventh grade teacher said it can be very
overwhelming for a new teacher who needed to determine priorities from one day to the next. Another seventh grade teacher talked about the rolling out of initiatives and said the plan should be simple:

Let’s pick something, stick with it, give it a little bit of time to either get better or really crash and burn, and then we determine whether or not it is going to work. Then move on to the next initiative. And then, once again: support, train, follow through, and repeat in order to make sure everyone understands and it works.

Summary of Findings

Themes and subthemes identified through the data analysis helped provide an in-depth perspective on the veteran educators’ perceptions regarding teacher retention at this small-city middle school. This chapter presented the findings of an anonymous survey of 50% of the veteran educators at Broome Middle School, along with summaries of one-to-one interviews with five veteran teachers and focus group interviews from three grade levels. Yielding three themes and 10 subthemes, this study uncovered factors that kept veteran educators in their small-city middle school and provided insights on how the district can improve practices to retain its teachers. Having reported these findings, the next chapter will interpret the results of this study, draw conclusions, and present recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide an in-depth and detailed examination of veteran educators’ perspectives of teacher retention at a small-city middle school. This chapter discusses and interprets the findings. It also relates the findings to the study’s research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. In addition, this chapter discusses
implications for practice and future research, as well as limitations of the research. It concludes with a reflection on the lessons learned while conducting this study and a chapter summary.

School Leadership

Strong school leadership was repeatedly cited as crucial to retaining teachers. Administrative support was repeatedly referenced in the questionnaire and interviews, and was tied to leadership developing relationships of trust and respect. The idea of building relationships recurred. The three subthemes generated under school leadership were Administrative turnover, administrative support for Student discipline follow through, and building a culture of Trust and respect.

Administrative turnover. Administrative turnover at BMS over the prior eight years was problematic. It was difficult to build relationships with building leaders who were not staying. With six principals over the course of seven years, principal leadership and support were among the most important factors cited in teachers’ decisions about whether to stay at BMS.

All veteran teachers interviewed were hired under leaders who had been in their roles for some time. The teachers spoke fondly of the previous administrations and felt supported by the old regimes. Now, in the midst of the changing administration, the educators indicated feeling a divide between the administrative team and teachers, a lack of personal connections, and a lack of support with student management. It was clear that principal turnover had seriously harmed teacher morale and values as the teachers attempted to adjust to new administrators and their shifts in leadership.

Student discipline follow through. Consistency with discipline and following the code of conduct was cited by all of those interviewed. While many indicated they understood that one
size might not fit all students, they still did not believe that the administrative team (including the assistant principals) consistently responded and supported the staff when behaviors presented themselves. One example was the student cursing incident. A student cursed at a teacher and no consequence resulted. The teacher stated, “It wasn’t until the student cursed at an assistant principal that an action was taken. A curse is a curse.” Teachers mentioned being questioned by the administrative team in regards to interventions they had used prior to writing the referral. Teachers indicated that the questioning was not done in a supportive manner and they often felt put on the defensive.

Trust and respect. It was apparent that mutual trust and respect among the administration, students, and colleagues within the school affected teachers’ perceptions of the school, as well as their job satisfaction and the amount of support that a teacher would seek from the principal. The administrative changes that occurred within the school brought a strong sense of uneasiness and contributed to teacher turnover. Support and trust are needed to build relationships. Teachers’ lack of trust in the principal can limit principals’ ability to support teachers. The implication is that trust must be present before teachers will accept support from the principal. When trust deteriorates, support will not happen. This seems to indicate how deeply intertwined teacher trust and principal support are for building relationships and, in turn, retaining teachers at BMS.

It is important to note that the majority of respondents had high hopes for the current principal, who had been serving for approximately one year. Teachers responded positively to the fact that the new principal had purchased a home in the community, which implied an intent to stay. Some stated that she had already supported them in addressing student issues and also
admitted to having challenging days. One teacher told of a conversation she had with the principal after a hectic day, stating: “She’s like that old administration we used to have.” She indicated that she saw the signs of a leader who acknowledged the workload of the teachers and helped them feel as if “they’re not just endlessly treading water.”

**School leadership summary.** The findings indicate that the principal’s ability to develop relationships, build trust, share decision making with the teachers, and assist with conflict management were all perceived to influence some aspect teacher retention. Teachers stated that they needed to feel valued and to have their opinions solicited as well as incorporated into decisions or policies. They believed the building leaders should foster a collaborative process and empower the teachers.

The three subthemes go together because clearly trust and support cannot be cultivated without steady leadership. Interestingly, the definitions of strong leadership, as reported in this study, primarily focused on relationship building. Administrative leadership was not defined in terms of instruction. Rather, those interviewed looked to their colleagues for instructional support and to the building leadership for support with student management issues.

**Increasing Teacher Efficacy**

As described in Chapter 4, the following subthemes emerged as influencing teacher efficacy: *Informal supports, Formal supports, New teacher supports*, and *Teacher autonomy*.

Bandura (1997) noted that collective efficacy requires group judgment and effort, along with persistence and willingness for the group to remain cohesive. Those interviewed agreed about the importance of collective efficacy and shared the perception that efforts of the faculty as
a whole (administration, teachers and support staff) would have a positive effect on students. The collective sentiment was that the emotional aspects of school climate cannot be ignored.

Specifically, if educators’ realities are filtered through the belief that they can do very little to influence student achievement, then it is very likely those beliefs will be manifested in their practice (Hattie, 2012). One teacher stated, “Every day is a new problem, and to be part of the solution on a daily basis to help these kids, I think, drives me to keep coming back.” Teachers collectively indicated that the principals as well as the staff can build collective efficacy by distilling the values and hopes and needs of everyone into a vision, and then encouraging and empowering everyone to pursue that vision.

**Informal supports.** Overwhelmingly, the teachers interviewed believed that informal support from colleagues was extremely important in helping them through hard times and encouraging them to stay at BMS. Everyone indicated that, even with supportive administration in the past, they would reach out to their colleagues first when advice or support was needed. These veteran teachers indicated that they continued this practice today. The fact that they perceived they had only each other to count on during the times of changes at BMS may have contributed to this. They often referred to each other as “best of friends” and “family.” Colleagues were the first line of emotional support during trying times. They all relied on each other for advice, guidance, and emotional support at BMS.

**Formal teacher supports.** In this case study, formal teacher supports referred to the district mentor program and professional learning communities (PLCs). In regards to the mentoring program, all teachers interviewed agreed that the mentoring program was crucial to new teachers’ survival. Having an assigned mentor alleviated the feeling of burdening someone
else with questions. The program provided a “built-in connection,” as one eighth grade teacher who was also a mentor described it. Of the 14 teachers interviewed, only two had mentors when first hired. The district mentoring plan was not officially started until 2008, and the majority of the teachers were hired before that.

A need for additional mentors was stated by the majority of those interviewed. Only two, however, were currently practicing as trained mentors. Three teachers indicated that they should offer their services and become a mentor but they simply didn’t have time. One teacher indicated that she had thought about it but wondered aloud about being able to be effective in the role.

The PLC initiative was rolled out three years ago with the financial support of a state systemic turnaround grant. The consensus of those interviews was that the PLCs were extremely helpful to all teachers, veteran and novice alike. Time was spent on curriculum work, building lessons and assessments together and studying student data. One concern was that not all teachers were part of a PLC. This could be due to scheduling issues (teachers teaching multiple courses are only part of one PLC) or being the only teacher in the building for a particular subject (honors courses, for example). PLCs without such conflicts were perceived to be functioning well. As one veteran eighth grade teacher stated, “PLCs provide additional professional development time. We work together to discuss best practices, ask for advice, and talk about what is working and what is not in regards to instruction.” Those interviewed indicated that PLCs alone did not contribute to teacher retention. They did, however, connect professional learning to the day-to-day realities faced by teachers in the classroom.

**New teacher support.** All teachers interviewed talked about their first-year experiences as a struggle. The amount to learn was overwhelming, and they did not feel prepared for
classroom management. One teacher talked about not having developed a discipline style or understanding what that even meant. The recurring theme was that there was never enough time in the day to complete everything: teaching, lesson plan preparation, curriculum writing, assessment, grading, parent contact, and more. One eighth grade self-contained teacher talked about feeling isolated from fellow educators, lonely, and sometimes abandoned. Worries about achieving tenure were shared. One seventh grade teacher lamented, “Would we pass muster or fail and wash out?”

Leaders need to clearly articulate faith in new teachers and demonstrate their support within the school community. Those interviewed believed this would increase new teachers’ efficacy as well as send a message to the students that the new teacher was supported by the administrative team. Frequent administrator visits to the classrooms, with a shout out to the teacher, was suggested as one way of doing this. One teacher said, “After all, they did hire them, so they should be supporting them!”

**Teacher autonomy.** Autonomy was not specifically defined by any respondent, yet teachers’ comments provided a sense that there was a common meaning: to have some space to make decisions, to do the job in a way defined by the individual rather than by the administrator, and to have the flexibility to change and adapt as necessary. The value teachers placed on autonomy appeared to be as important as the value placed on relationships. This may suggest that many teachers do best when autonomous decision making is embedded within a supportive community. Taking pride in their work, seeing student successes, and feeling accomplished contributed to the majority of the teachers interviewed wanting to return every day.
The ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge, and attitudes as a teacher, in cooperation with others, was perceived as essential for new teachers to remain at BMS. The teachers perceived they were held accountable, but at times their autonomy was limited. Their concerns regarding lack of input and support in managing students were prevalent in this study. There was a pervasive dichotomy between increasing support from the new principal and lack of support with student issues. While the teachers believed the new principal was working to bring the staff together, they overwhelmingly continued to be frustrated with the lack of administrative support in dealing with student behavior.

**Teacher efficacy summary.** According to Hoy (2000), new teachers’ confidence about their ability can increase when they witness student growth and work in a collaborative environment. The school setting itself, especially the ways in which teachers new to the profession are socialized, can have a powerful effect on a teacher’s sense of efficacy. It appears that the veteran teachers at BMS supported each other and the new teachers, but many did not yet feel comfortable seeking help from the administrators. Collective efficacy cannot ignore the emotional aspects of school climate. While the tide appears to be turning at BMS, there is still much work to be done.

**District Systems Findings**

District systems involves structures driven from the building, district, or state-level administration. In reviewing the interview data, the following structures emerged as affecting teacher retention at BMS: *Scheduling*, the *Teacher evaluation system*, and *New initiatives*.

**Scheduling.** Effective school schedules can maximize the time teachers spend with their students and support teachers’ additional responsibilities, which exist beyond instructional time.
At BMS, the schedule did not allow all teachers time for collaboration. Veteran teachers indicated that because teachers are largely separate from other educators during instruction, the lack of time for collaboration can be very isolating. Providing all teachers with collaborative time to plan and review student data can support new teachers and stretch more seasoned teachers. This in turn can increase the likelihood of teacher retention.

Secondly, administrative support was not readily accessible at certain times during the school day. This was due to scheduling child study team meetings when administrators and other building support personnel met to discuss a variety of student issues. While the importance of these meetings was not in question, the fact that they were scheduled during the school day was perceived as problematic by the veteran teachers.

**Teacher evaluation system.** In 2010, all schools in the state were required to develop a new teacher evaluation system. It said that 20% of a teacher’s evaluation would be based on student growth on a state assessment or other comparable measure, 20% would be based on student achievement on other locally selected measures, and 60% would be based on locally negotiated evidence of teacher effectiveness. All teachers interviewed mentioned stress caused by the new evaluation system. To these veteran teachers at BMS, this new system, which used student test scores as part of a teacher’s evaluation, contributed to the reasons why new teachers might leave BMS. The evaluation system in effect “demeaned and demoralized teachers while elevating the pressure on students for performance on awful 3-8 tests.” One teacher stated, “It put a dark cloud over everything because then everybody was starting to worry.” In a high-needs district that struggled with student performance, teachers of all experience levels were
concerned. Uncertainties associated with the new evaluation system and administration were clearly of concern to all teachers interviewed.

**New initiatives.** In talking about new initiatives, the veteran teachers at BMS first asserted that too many initiatives had been introduced and secondly discussed the need for continued embedded support during the roll-out of any initiatives. One teacher stated, “You read it in theory and it sounds great. And then you throw it at us. We need proper training, we need proper support, and we need follow through.” While specific initiatives were not cited, this sentiment was shared among those interviewed.

In regard to new teachers, the seventh grade team stressed the importance of giving new teachers a core set of standards and practices to focus on during the first few years. Rather than having to “do it all,” core priorities need to be developed for the new teachers to master during their first few years of employment. According to one teacher, “The list of things new teachers are expected to know and be able to do has only grown in recent years. We need to help rookie teachers with classroom management and motivation of students before anything else.”

**Discussion of Findings in Relationship to the Literature**

The multiple sources of data, including the questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups, was aligned with the literature and provided insight on how this urban middle school was situated in the broader literature base. Triangulation offered validation and support to previous research in the area and hence can provide thoughtful recommendations that will fit into the context of this school and the needs of its educators (Creswell, 2015; Lincoln and Guba, 1989; Machi & McEvoy, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2013).
School leadership, identified as a key theme in this study, has been cited in previous research as crucial to teacher retention (Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Ladd, 2011). BMS veteran teachers identified the quality of administrative support as an essential factor in decisions to leave a school. In addition, the teachers pointed to other areas in which the principal played a central role – school culture and collegial relationships, time for collaboration, and decision-making input – as being important to retaining teachers.

As indicated in the literature review, teachers’ perception of working conditions is closely related to their perception of the principal. In other words, the way a teacher sees his or her administrator can shape the way the teacher perceives conditions in the school, even before any changes are made and regardless of what else is going on in the school or district. Ingersoll and May (2011) stated, “Data suggest that the roots of the teacher shortage largely reside in the working conditions within schools and districts.” Added to this, Boyd et al. (2011) found that dissatisfaction with school administration had by far the greatest influence of all the working condition factors on teachers’ decisions to stay at or leave their schools.

As stated, administrative turnover was a problem at BMS. The reasons for the high turnover of administrators was not elicited from this study, however, it is clear that any leader who is hired needs to be prepared for the challenges offered at this middle school. Probably the most important thing the district level can do to improve student achievement is to attract, retain, and support the continued learning of well-prepared and committed leaders. In urban schools, just as in suburban and rural districts, good teachers gravitate to places where they know they will be appreciated; they are sustained by the other good teachers who become their colleagues; and together these teachers become a magnet for still others who are attracted to environments
where they can learn from their colleagues and create success for their students. Great school leaders create great school environments for accomplished teaching to flourish and grow (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Building teacher efficacy through informal and formal supports can improve performance, commitment, and professional retention (Boyd et al. 2009, Darling-Hammond, 2003; Guskey, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In this study, the veterans cited the importance of informal and formal supports that help teachers develop their capabilities and confidence in practice. Hoy (2000) suggested that “some of the most powerful influences on the development of teacher efficacy are mastery experiences during student teaching and the induction year.” Thus, “the first years of teaching could be critical to the long-term development of teacher efficacy” (p. 99).

In regards to district systems, conversations regarding scheduling, teacher evaluation, and roll out of initiatives were prevalent. The creation of the student master schedule was a building administrative decision, the teacher evaluation system was handed down by the state, and the new initiatives referred to could have been handed down from the building, district, or state-level administration. All of this was perceived by the veterans as out of the teachers’ hands. Teachers derive greater satisfaction from their work and are more likely to stay in teaching when they perceive they have greater autonomy and the opportunity to contribute to school-wide decision making (S. M. Johnson, 2006; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2016). This autonomy leads to a sense of ownership and empowerment where teachers aim to grow within their profession and to seek increased responsibility (DuFour & DuFour, 2013).
Prospective teachers tend to search close to their hometowns and in regions similar to where they grew up (Shirrell & Reininger, 2017; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). District location influenced teachers remaining at BMS, according to 53% of the veteran teachers responding to the questionnaire. While this was not expanded upon in the questionnaire, it is interesting to note that of the 14 veteran educators interviewed, 10 graduated from the BMD and returned to teach and ultimately raise their families in the community.

Finally, it is important to note that the literature review as well as the anonymous questionnaire presented additional factors relating to teacher retention that were not pervasive in the interviews with the veteran teachers at BMS. Parental engagement, resources and facilities, and district location were all cited by the majority of the respondents to the questionnaire as contributing to teacher retention. They were not, however, expanded upon in the short-answer portion of the questionnaire nor in any of the one-to-one or focus group interviews. Parental engagement could influence a teacher’s decision to stay at BMS, according to 63% of the questionnaire respondents, however, this was not expanded upon beyond the questionnaire. While just under 50% of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that resources and facilities significantly affected teachers’ decisions to remain at BMS, this particular concern was not mentioned among the teachers interviewed as a primary concern tied to teacher retention at BMS. In fact, the only mention of resources throughout the interviews was made by one veteran seventh grade teacher, who noted the lack of appropriate desks in the classroom when she first started teaching 17 years ago.

**Discussion of Findings in Relationship to the Conceptual Framework**
Organizational theory provided the guiding framework for finding answers to the retention question and understanding the complexity of this phenomenon. Albert and Whetten (1985) argued that organizational identity is what employees understand to be the central attributes of the organization. Organizational identification can affect employee satisfaction and behavior as well as organizational effectiveness (Albert et al., 2000; Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Research specific to teacher retention has validated that teacher turnover is profoundly influenced by the organizational conditions in schools. Research has shown that teachers prefer some schools over others (or leave the field altogether) because they are dissatisfied with school organization and are seeking better working conditions (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson et al., 2012). In addition, within the framework of organizational identity, research has demonstrated that teachers may be attracted to a school’s strong identity and culture, and they are retained when their work conditions align with that identity and culture.

The reality is that schools are complex systems that reach beyond the original purpose of teaching academics. In terms of the organizational identity of this urban middle school, it seems apparent that the school’s collective efficacy cannot ignore the emotional aspects of school climate. The veteran teachers found support within and among themselves. According to Mesmer-Magnus, et al. (2015), “the psychological bonds employees form with their work teams and organizations have a profound effect on their experience of work” (p.9). This collective solidarity provided one of the necessary supports to maintaining these veteran teachers. This is also what they perceived to be crucial to retaining new teachers at BMS. While leadership was extremely important to these veteran teachers, it was lacking. Collective team building at the
teacher level kept the veteran teachers going and connected them with their identity as an organization.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings provide insight into the teacher retention issues prevalent at urban middle schools throughout the United States. The attrition rate of teachers in urban schools implies that over half the teachers leave before they are fully developed (Waddell, 2010; Wong, Wong, & Seroyer, 2009). The purpose of this case study was to understand veteran teacher perspectives on teacher retention and provide insight for local educational officials and school leaders.

When a principal can create a school culture that is trusting, then the school can shift towards being more successful (Hoy et al., 2006). Building administration needs to be people oriented and focus less on task-oriented work. A continued focus on increased academic content and improved test scores, without attention to the affective factors that add value to the organizational learning experience, can be detrimental to a school’s success. Training and support for principals transitioning into schools and focusing on how to create productive, collaborative school environments that foster continuous improvement are imperative to a school’s success and training teachers in the school. From a practical perspective, Title II funds can be used to support strengthening these leaders in promoting a culture of respect and community. At the district level, work can be done with all building leadership to develop leadership styles that embrace transition and ethical considerations.

District hiring practices need to be reviewed. Advertising and interviewing for urban leaders who are capable of building a culture of collaboration, high expectations, and accountability is a must. According to Childress, S., Elmore R., & Grossman (2006), “if every
teacher in the district raised just two children in every classroom to the next level of achievement each year, it would be enough for the district to maintain its impressive progress” (p. 7). The district needs to find and support leaders who can instill the immediate need for such progress to occur.

Informal teacher supports were cited as a main reason why veteran teachers remained at BMS. Valuing novice teachers by making deliberate efforts to get to know them and creating an environment where new teachers feel supported is crucial. All educators can take an active role in this and need to understand that it may be difficult for new teachers to ask for help for fear that they will be looked down upon if they do.

Capitalizing on the veteran teachers’ input and empowering teachers to take on leadership roles can give educators a true stake in their school. When teachers have a role in making important school decisions, feel their voices are heard, and can actively participate in building school culture, efficacy is raised. The findings suggest that collaborative working conditions are important to teachers. School officials should consider continued support of shared decision making teams and scheduling committees, as well as ensuring that professional learning communities are available to all educators. On a lighter note, encouraging regular team-building activities and social gatherings can build camaraderie and team capacity within all ranks.

Formal supports need to be reviewed as well. While the mentoring program is deemed necessary, changes to the current program may improve its overall goal of retaining teachers. What needs to be done to encourage veteran teachers to become more active in the program? Following up on this question with a survey of teachers might help determine the answer. The mentoring program rejuvenation also needs to include building a pool of mentors who can
connect appropriately to the new hires by matching grade, department, and building levels. It also needs to consider the support and training of teachers who enter at different points during the year. The teacher orientation program currently is offered only one time during the summer.

The District has signed on to work in a 3 year project funded by National Educators Association in partnership with New York State Union of Teachers & a local university to create a dialogue and reflection with early career educators, mentors, and union activists around issues of equity, diversity and racial, ethnic/social justice. The district is looking to redesign the mentoring experience to include racial justice issues in support of its newest hires.

In addition, professional development that supports new hires should be considered. Recommendations include topics dealing with the effects of trauma on students, diversity, cultural relevancy, understanding poverty, and classroom management strategies. These learning experiences should be high quality and job embedded. Assisting the new teachers with determining priorities may make the new position seem less daunting and overwhelming.

Taking it one step further, this researcher suggests applicable professional development and focused work for all staff to support the understanding of students in poverty as well as examining how their own personal beliefs may affect students. This can help educators explore their own ideas and attitudes about diversity and offer specific strategies and tools targeted to those needs. Darling Hammond (2010) noted that the lack of adequate preparation in incorporating student cultures can often lead to antagonism towards students of color or poverty. Teachers may blame children and families for their own lack of success. Supporting teachers with self-reflection may help them determine what can they do to support the students rather than looking to others to find solutions. Professional development for all staff could include reading
articles, book circles with staff, and the use of instructional coaches to assist all teachers with thinking critically about race and inequity in practice.

In summary, top-down, overly evaluative leadership models can lower teacher self-efficacy and ultimately demoralize teachers, reducing teacher retention. When teachers and leadership work together toward mutual goals, a shared belief in the direction of the work and the ability to effect change with students will grow.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study was exploratory and interpretive in nature, and raises a number of opportunities for future research. More research will be necessary to elaborate and apply its findings to other urban middle schools. This is one small case study on a problem plaguing the educational community nationwide. Based on previous research and the findings of this study, several recommendations are made.

The study could be replicated in a larger or smaller urban middle school to determine whether it would yield similar findings. The study could be replicated in an urban middle school where the researcher is not a district administrator. The study could be opened up to educators of all experience levels and then provide an analysis based on years of experience in teaching within the building, at the grade level, and so on.

Further research into successful induction programs, including mentoring, especially in areas with teachers at a higher risk of attrition, is needed. In addition, a look at hiring practices that specifically recruit teachers who have been trained in context-specific programs dealing with urban middle school students could prove helpful. Programs such as Teach for America or the NYC Teaching Fellows are examples of this. Investigating the success of grow-your-own
programs to encourage students to return to teach in their hometown schools might prove helpful, considering that 10 of the 14 educators interviewed were born and raised in the BMS community.

Lastly, future work could extend beyond aggregate measures of turnover to examine whether some organizational context dimensions matter more to certain subgroups of teachers, such as novices or highly effective teachers. Educators may also benefit from additional studies examining whether and why relationships between school contexts and teacher and student outcomes differ across K-12 school levels.

**Limitations of the Research**

The intent of the research was to study Broome Middle School in depth to obtain an understanding of practices and the perceptions of the staff. The information gleaned will be used to study changes at BMS specifically and was not intended to be generalized to other situations. Causal connections cannot be made because other factors may be involved in a different setting.

As noted in Chapter 3, the researcher was a district-level administrator in the district hosting the studied school. This could have affected some responses even though participation was voluntary and all protocols were followed as prescribed by the IRB.

As with any research project, inherent bias needs to be considered, acknowledged, and reflected upon. The researcher addressed researcher bias in Chapter 3. In addition, the bias of the veteran teachers needs to be considered. As educators we need to be aware of our own implicit racial biases that can activated unconsciously and involuntarily. The best means of addressing unconscious discrimination is continued improvement on the part of educators.
Lessons Learned

Like all schools, BMS is responsible for accountability measures and increased pressure for school performance. As an urban middle school with less than 12% of its population scoring at proficiency level, these measures cannot be ignored. However, as this case study indicates, there is more to student development than test scores; as the findings suggest, relationships at all levels are important for student, teacher, and school-wide success.

In the Broome School District, most administrative and central office team members are new to their roles. The case study provided a glimpse of the underlying issues at Broome Middle School. The team understands that organizational change does not happen overnight; it is working diligently to understand the problems faced and support the teachers and students during the transition.

The researcher believes it is important to note that 72% of the veteran teachers interviewed for the case study graduated from the local high school and returned to the community. These teachers provide institutional knowledge through personal experiences and having an understanding of the families and the local community infrastructure. Moving forward, the researcher is excited to continue working in the area of teacher retention. As a district administrator, the researcher is part of a team working to develop new prospective high school pathways for students. As a scholar-practitioner, the researcher will use the case study findings to support the new pathway programs at the high school in cooperation with the local community college and four-year college to build student interest and awareness in the teaching profession.

Chapter Summary
Chapter 5 provided an overview of the study, along with implications for future practice and research and limitations. The findings provide support for further discussions regarding teacher retention in urban middle schools. The findings provide valuable information to the researcher’s team for improving practices to retain teachers at this middle school. Given that the teacher retention problem is increasing in America’s schools, additional study is needed to overcome the problem. The researcher hopes educational leaders will become more aware of the issues surrounding teacher retention and therefore be more deliberate in addressing the needs of our newest hires.
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Appendix A: Meeting Script

As a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University I am conducting a case study on teacher retention in small city urban middle schools. Specifically, I am focusing on Broome Middle School (BMS) and looking to understand why the retention rate is lower than other schools in the District and lower than the state average. Questions will focus on career choices, job satisfaction and your perceptions of what is needed to keep teachers at BMS. It is my hope that the information learned will provide strategies for improving teacher retention at BMS.

I am asking you to participate in my research in order to collect the necessary data. My research consists of the following:

- **Questionnaire:** The questionnaire will be available utilizing Survey Monkey, an electronic survey maker that collects all responses and tallies the results. All responses are confidential and will contribute to data collection for the purpose of a dissertation pertaining to teacher retention in urban middle schools.

- **One-to one interview:** The first five (5) participants who volunteer will take part in these interviews. I will meet with each participant individually one time for no more than sixty (60) minutes. The second interview will be as needed for follow up and/or clarification. Questions for the 2nd interview will be developed based upon the first interview. Participation would take approximately 45-60 minutes. We can meet at a time and location that is convenient to you.

- **Focus group participation:** The focus group will be grade level specific and take place at a time and place that is convenient for everyone in the grade level. Each focus group will be interviewed once for no more than sixty (60) minutes.

All information is completely confidential. The only people who will have access to the interview recording will be me, as a Student Researcher, and Dr. Sara Ewell, the Principal Researcher. The one to one interviews and the focus groups will be audio recorded. After the audio has been transcribed, we will be sharing the transcription of the discussions with each of the participants for feedback and accuracy. Once complete, transcriptions will be destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

At the start of each of the research above you will receive a consent form. Signed consent forms will be discussed at the beginning of any interview or focus groups. After all questions are answered, those who wish to participate will sign the form. that will need to be signed. This form
explains the process in its entirety. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions or if you wish to volunteer for this study, please contact me at 518-441-2208 or downing.mic@husky.neu.edu. If you do not contact me to volunteer, you will not be contacted again regarding this research.
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter for Interview Participants

September, 2017

Dear Broome Middle School Educator,

As a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University I am conducting a case study on teacher retention in small city urban middle schools. Specifically, I am focusing on Broome Middle School (BMS) and looking to understand why the retention rate is lower than other schools in the District and lower than the state average. Questions will focus on career choices, job satisfaction and your perceptions of what is needed to keep teachers at BMS. It is my hope that the information learned will provide strategies for improving teacher retention at BMS.

I am asking you to participate in my research in order to collect the necessary data. Participation would entail a one-to-one interview that would take approximately 45-60 minutes. We can meet at a time and location that is convenient to you. All information is completely confidential. Your identity will simply be designated as “Participant ____” in all documentation. The only people who will have access to the interview recording will be me, as a Student Researcher, and Dr. Sara Ewell, the Principal Researcher. After the audio has been transcribed, it will be destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

At the start of the interview you will receive a consent form that will need to be signed. This form explains the process in its entirety. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions or if you wish to volunteer for this study, please contact me at 518-441-2208 or downing.mic@husky.neu.edu. If you do not contact me to volunteer, you will not be contacted again regarding this research.

Thank you,

Michele A. Downing
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies
Appendix C: Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to assist with analyzing the problem of teacher retention at the Broome Middle School (BMS). The survey will be available utilizing Survey Monkey, an electronic survey maker that collects all responses and tallies the results. All responses are confidential and will contribute to data collection for the purpose of a dissertation pertaining to teacher retention in urban middle schools. If you have any questions, please contact Michele Downing at downing.mic@husky.neu.edu. Thank you in advance for your participation.

1. How many years have you been a teacher or administrator at BMS?
   - This is my 5th year
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16-20 years
   - 21-25 years
   - more than 5 years

2. What race do you best identify with?
   - Caucasian
   - African American
   - Hispanic
   - Asian
   - Other

3. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

4. Did you have teaching experience prior to coming to BMS?
   - Yes
   - No

5. If the answer for #4 above was yes, please describe this experience(s).

6. Are you a current mentor in the district (teachers answer only)?
   - Yes
   - No

7. Were you assigned a mentor when you first arrived at BMS (teachers answer only)?
   - Yes
   - No
8. On a scale of 1-5, how do you perceive the following factors as influencing a teacher’s decision to stay at BMS as an educator?
   1: N/A
   2. No influence at all
   3. Minimal Influence
   4. Influenced
   5. Significantly Influenced

   ____ Recruitment Practices
   ____ Teacher Salary
   ____ Teacher Efficacy (the extent to which a teacher feels capable to help students learn and succeed)
   ____ School Leadership
   ____ Formal Collegial Support including PLCs & mentoring
   ____ Informal Collegial Supports
   ____ Middle School Student Behavior
   ____ Teacher Autonomy
   ____ Parent Engagement
   ____ Resources & Facilities
   ____ District Location
   ____ District Size

9. In your opinion, what are the three (3) things that you feel contributed most to the teacher turnover at BMS in the last 5 years? Feel free to explain.

10. In your opinion, what can the school and/or district do to retain teachers in the middle school? Feel free to explain.
Appendix D: One to One Interview Protocol and Questions

**Introduction**
Thank you for being available to speak with me today and agreeing to participate. I appreciate your input and assistance because you are someone who has a great deal to share about your experience with understanding teacher supports within school districts. My primary aim is to look at strategies that will support retaining qualified teachers in a high poverty, high needs district. Your experiences will help me frame the problem at hand.

This study focuses on the experiences of teachers and administrators in high poverty, high needs school districts. Specifically, it explores how an experienced educator describes supports beginning as a new teacher and following throughout the career. The hope is that this research can be used to help schools and districts understand the problem of retaining teachers in these hard to staff areas and provide guidance on successful retention practices.

First, I want to emphasize that everything you share will remain anonymous, and that your participation is completely voluntary. If you don’t mind, I would like to review these consent forms with you before we begin.

[ReviewNEU Consent Forms]

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today so I can focus on our conversation. I will then transcribe the interview and share it with you for your review. Finally, I will forward you a copy of my overall findings soliciting your comments or corrections? Do you have any concerns with any piece of this?

This interview should last 45-60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Do you have any questions before we start?

**Interview Questions**

1. Please tell me about what prompted you to enter the education profession.
2. Can you tell me about your first years teaching or being an administrator in Broome Middle School (BMS)?
3. What made you want to return?
4. What supports in the first 3 years do you believe contributed to your success and desire to remain in the profession?
5. Looking beyond the first 3 years, what aspects of the job, contributed to making you want to remain in the profession?
6. What additional supports do you believe a new teacher may need?
7. Specifically, what is the administration support like during a teacher’s first 3 years at BMS?
8. What is the administrative support like beyond year 3?
9. Is there anything administration could do differently to provide support to teachers?
10. How do you think the characteristics of the leadership influence teachers reasons for staying in the profession?
11. Specifically, do you believe the district’s mentoring program plays a role in teacher retention? Please explain.
12. Specifically, do you believe that PLC’s as they are practiced at BMS play a role in teacher retention? Please explain.
13. Specifically, how do building informal relationships at BMS play a role in teacher retention? Please explain.
14. Fast forward to today, what supports do you see our new teachers needing? What additional supports (not previously mentioned) currently in play seem to be working? Which are not?

Thank you, that concludes the interview questions for this interview.

If I come across a need to ask any follow-up questions, which would most likely only be the case if I felt clarification was needed in regards to one of your responses, would it be alright for me to contact you? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?

Sometime over the next month, I will email you word-for-word transcripts. If you chose, you can review the information, and you will have one week to provide me with any feedback, alterations, or corrections. Can you please confirm the email address you would like for me to email the transcripts to? Do you have any questions for me? Thank you so much for your participation in this study!
Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol & Questions

Introduction
Thank you for being available to take part in this focus group today and agreeing to participate. I appreciate your input and assistance because you are a group who has a great deal to share about your experiences and understanding of teacher supports within this school district. My primary aim is to look at strategies that will support retaining qualified teachers in a high poverty, high needs district. Your experiences will help me frame the problem at hand.

This study focuses on the experiences of teachers and administrators in high poverty, high needs school districts. Specifically, it explores how experienced educators describe supports beginning as a new teacher and following throughout the career. The hope is that this research can be used to help schools and districts understand the problem of retaining teachers in these hard to staff areas and provide guidance on successful retention practices.

First, I want to emphasize that everything you share will remain anonymous, and that your participation is completely voluntary. If you don’t mind, I would like to review these consent forms with you before we begin.

[ReviewNEU Consent Forms]

Because the conversations are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today so I can focus on our conversation. I will then transcribe the interview and share it with you for your review. Finally, I will forward you a copy of my overall findings soliciting your comments or corrections? Do you have any concerns with any piece of this?

This focus group should last 60-90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Do you have any questions before we start?

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about what prompted you to enter the education profession.
2. Can you tell me about your first years teaching or being an administrator in Broome middle School (BMS)?
3. What made you want to return?
4. What supports in the first 3 years do you believe contributed to your success and desire to remain in the profession?
5. Looking beyond the first 3 years, what aspects of the job, contributed to making you want to remain in the profession?
6. What additional supports do you believe a new teacher may need?
7. Specifically, what is the administration support like during a teacher’s first 3 years at BMS?
8. What is the administrative support like beyond year 3?
9. Is there anything administration could do differently to provide support to teachers?
10. How do you think the characteristics of the leadership influence teachers reasons for staying in the profession?
11. Specifically, do you believe the district’s mentoring program plays a role in teacher retention? Please explain.
12. Specifically, do you believe that PLC’s as they are practiced at BMS play a role in teacher retention? Please explain.
13. Specifically, how do building informal relationships at BMS play a role in teacher retention? Please explain.
14. Fast forward to today, what supports do you see our new teachers needing? What additional supports (not previously mentioned) currently in play seem to be working? Which are not?

Thank you, that concludes the questions for this focus group.

If I come across a need to ask any follow-up questions, which would most likely only be the case if I felt clarification was needed in regards to one of your responses, would it be alright for me to contact you? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?

Sometime over the next month, I will email you word-for-word transcripts. If you chose, you can review the information, and you will have one week to provide me with any feedback, alterations, or corrections. Can you please confirm the email address you would like for me to email the transcripts to? Do you have any questions for me? Thank you so much for your participation in this study!