HEARING THE TEACHER’S VOICE: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF TENURE IN K-12 EDUCATION

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Abstract

In this qualitative, basic inductive study the varied opinions and viewpoints reported by tenured teachers pertaining to current tenure practices utilized in K-12 education are investigated and documented. Given that an in-depth qualitative view of teacher perceptions are not well represented in the current literature, this study queried five teachers through a series of interviews to bring the teacher’s voice into the discussion about current K-12 tenure practices. The study investigates the participants’ views on the benefits and drawbacks of teacher tenure based on their first-hand experiences. Additionally, the participants share their interpretations and opinions on current national tenure reform initiatives.

_Keyword:_ teacher tenure, K-12 tenure, teacher, reform
Dedication

In loving memory of my sister,

Melissa Ann Walsh, the brightest star in my sky

In one of the stars I shall be living

In one of them I shall be laughing

And so it will be as if all the stars were laughing

When you look at the sky at night

Antoine de Saint-Exupery
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Topic

Teacher quality and accountability have become a focal point of American education given that teacher quality is a powerful and significant predictor of student performance (Ryan & Cooper, 2009). Discussions about accountability have heightened the debate about the benefits and implications of granting tenure to teachers in K-12 education.

Researchers contend that current teacher tenure systems potentially allow ineffective teachers to remain in the classroom (Hess & West, 2006, Murphy, 1990). Alternatively, advocates of tenure argue that a practitioner’s performance and abilities can be adequately assessed with the current system ensuring that only dedicated and motivated educators are granted tenure (Thibodeaux, 2011).

Two-thirds of teachers who participated in a Gates’ Foundation Survey reported not feeling that teachers were being adequately heard in the debate on education including the area of tenure practices (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). To that end, this study analyzed and documented the perceptions and opinions of five tenured teachers regarding their first hand experiences with teacher tenure in K-12 education, as well as their views regarding national tenure reform scenarios.

A scenario. Mrs. Smith is the type of teacher that parents hope for their children to have in school. Colleagues often joke with her about putting a cot in her classroom, given the long hours that she spends preparing for her lessons.

On an autumn day in late October, Mrs. Smith entered the principal’s office with a distressed expression and she quickly asked for permission to close the office door. Mrs. Smith began by repeating three times, “I am so angry!” with varying levels of intensity and
becoming more forceful each time she repeated the statement. Mrs. Smith went on to
describe a meeting that had just concluded, which she had requested and held with a
colleague who teaches at the grade below her. Mrs. Smith described her encounter,
explaining that she had indicated to her colleague Mr. Jones, that she was fed up with his
ineptness. She had explained that because all of his students became her students, she was
forced to attempt to teach two school years’ worth of content in order to make up for what
he had not accomplished the previous year. She detailed the chaotic nature of Mr. Jones
classroom, explaining that kids come and go as they please, and that the noise level is so
high that it is disturbing to neighboring classrooms. She expressed that the number of
videos and movies being shown by Mr. Jones is excessive. To help provide empirical
evidence of her concerns to her colleague, she shared the scores from a test she had
administered to her students in September, which demonstrated that they had not
mastered the majority of the skills that they should have prior to entering her classroom.
She also explained the academic and behavioral challenges associated with having to
acclimate students to her expectations, in contrast to what they had become accustomed to
during the previous year.

She indicated that her frustration at the conclusion of the meeting was elevated by
Mr. Jones being dismissive and indifferent to the concerns she shared with him. She noted
that she knew the administrators were aware of the problems, as evidenced by how
frequently they visit his classroom. She also explained that she had heard Mr. Jones
grumbling about disciplinary letters being placed in his file, but reported that those
measures have been generally futile.
“I know that your hands are completely tied. I know he’s tenured!” she fumed to the principal. “Do you know who is getting hurt by this?” she asked rhetorically. “It’s the kids, that’s who!”

**The researcher’s involvement.** During the course of the researcher’s nine years as a school principal, it has been her priority to hire and retain outstanding educators. The researcher has been integrally involved in making decisions about granting tenure to teachers concluding their probationary periods of employment, which was typically a three year period. Additionally, the researcher has participated in frank conversations with several teachers regarding their viewpoints on tenure and she has been surprised and impressed by the wide-ranging and impassioned opinions that surround the topic. The researcher’s bias relates to experiences that she has had with underperforming teachers, who despite being offered constructive feedback and professional development, have had little incentive to make sustainable improvements in their professional practices, given that holding tenure status ultimately ensures a teachers’ continued employment with a school district.

**Statement of the Problem**

Discussions about accountability have raised numerous questions about the practice of granting tenure to teachers in the field of K-12 education, which is a common practice in the majority of public schools in the United States, and in essence bestows job security to teachers, regardless of work ethic or the quality of professional performance (Barnett & McCormick, 2003).

Teacher quality and accountability have become a focal point of American education given that teacher quality is a powerful and significant predictor of student performance
Ryan & Cooper, 2009). Several researchers contend that current teacher tenure systems potentially allow ineffective teachers to remain in the classroom (Hess & West, 2006; & Murphy, 1990). Alternatively, advocates of tenure argue that a practitioner’s performance and abilities can be adequately assessed with the current system ensuring that only dedicated and motivated educators are granted tenure (Thibodeaux, 2011). While researchers, advocates and critics alike make compelling arguments on both sides regarding the practice of tenure in K-12 education, the voice of teachers regarding tenure practices, as well as the benefits and drawbacks is not well represented within the current literature (Hanushek, 2009, Hess and West 2006, Thibodeaux, 2011).

While there is limited research reflecting teachers’ opinions regarding tenure practices, a study conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2012) found that 89% of the 40,000 teachers surveyed concur that tenure should reflect evaluations of teacher effectiveness; and 92% of teacher participants indicated that tenure should not protect ineffective teachers. Additionally, Hess and West (2006) reported that 58% of teachers they surveyed suggested that earning tenure did not necessarily mean such teachers have worked hard and have proven themselves to be highly skilled. Furthermore, as it pertains to education reform two-thirds of educators surveyed indicated that they felt teachers were not adequately heard in the debate on education including tenure practices and tenure reform initiatives (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). Moe (2001) contended that the existence of unions restricts individual teacher viewpoints from being conveyed and heard, because the union voice tends to represent the entire teaching force, whether the views expressed are prominent, or not in regards to local and national educational issues. Increased criticism of the current tenure practices in K-12 education, as
well as the protections afforded by teachers being granted tenure is evident (Gates Foundation Study, 2012). Despite the controversy related to tenure practices, and the fact that current processes are being widely debated amongst educational reformers, the current literature, including the study conducted by the Gates Foundation (2012) and Hess’s (2007) report fail to document teacher perceptions related to this issue in an in-depth manner.

The existing literature regarding teachers’ perceptions of tenure practices is limited. A Gates Foundation (2012) study indicates that tenure practices in K-12 education directly impact educators; however their viewpoints and opinions based on their direct experiences are not well represented. The primary value of the research study is a contribution to the extant conversation regarding tenure in K-12 education, and will serve as a basis for future research, as the conversation continues to evolve.

As previously referenced, two-thirds of teachers who were surveyed reported not feeling that teachers were being adequately heard in the debate on education including the arena of tenure practices (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). This researcher’s objective is to provide audiences with a window into tenured teachers’ perspectives on tenure practices, which have become the subject of debate and criticism. The proposed study aims to understand and communicate the point of view of educators in the K-12 field regarding tenure practices and discussions related to tenure reform.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Every child deserves an opportunity to enter a classroom, which is occupied by a high quality, effective, and dedicated educator (Darling-Hammond as cited in Ryan & Cooper, 2009). Effective teachers have profoundly positive effects on student achievement
Based on their analysis of 400,000 students in 3,000 schools, Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (1998) contended that while school quality is a significant determinant of student achievement, the most important predictor is teacher quality. Teacher quality is a significant consideration, because as Hanushek (2009) asserted, the difference in achievement for students who have a highly effective teacher, as opposed to those who do not, can exceed the equivalent of one grade-level in annual academic growth.

Opponents of the practice of granting tenure in K-12 educational systems argued that tenure may contribute to complacency, because maintaining the status quo or less in some cases, will not lead to a teacher losing his or her job (Thibodeaux, 2011). Proponents cited job security and academic freedom as positive outcomes of the tenure process (Lyons, 2005). While politicians, legislators and educational researchers have raised questions about the practice of granting tenure to teachers in K-12 educational settings, teachers’ perceptions of the practice are not readily represented within the literature. Despite assumptions or generalizations regarding the viewpoints of teachers related to K-12 tenure practices, the Gates Foundation Study (2012) highlighted the fact that teachers do not feel their true perceptions or ideas for reform are being adequately heard or represented in the debate surrounding topics such as tenure practices within K-12 education, both locally and nationally.

**The history of K-12 tenure.** Teacher tenure in K-12 education dates back to the 19th century, during which time there were not policies or regulations in place that protected teachers from being fired (Brill, 2011). Stephey (2008) compared the initiation of the tenure movement as being similar to workers in the steel or auto industries’ battle against dangerous working conditions and low wages. Teachers sought shelter from
parents and school administrators trying to demand that lesson plans reflected certain themes, or demanded that controversial topics or reading materials be eliminated altogether (Stephey, 2008). Brill (2011) asserts that without employment safeguards, teachers could be dismissed for literally any reason. Race, creed, gender, political affiliation and favoritism were typical reasons for teachers being terminated before 1885, and women could even be fired for becoming pregnant (Brill, 2011).

Approximately 10,000 teachers met in Chicago in 1885 for the first conference of the National Educator’s Association, which has since become one of the most authoritative teachers’ unions in the United States, and teacher tenure was the primary agenda item at the meeting (Stephey, 2008, Brill, 2011). The National Education Association delivered a report demanding political action to protect teachers which led to Massachusetts becoming the first state to pass a pre-college tenure law (Stephey, 2008). New Jersey was the first state to enact a comprehensive tenure law in 1909 that protected all K-12 teachers (Brill, 2011). Following The Great Depression, the foremost teachers unions were established and their leading mission was to fight for job protection and benefits (Stephey, 2008), and by the mid-1950s, 80 percent of all teachers in K-12 education were tenured (Brill, 2011). Upwards of 2.3 million teachers in the United States currently hold tenure status in K-12 education, which protects them from being dismissed without due cause, thus making it difficult to fire a teacher without proof of gross misbehavior or incompetence (Robinson, 2008). Compared to the late 1800s, when teachers could be dismissed on a whim, firing teachers under the current tenure laws is arduous and expensive, and in recent years in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles schools across the states have each fired fewer than 1 out of 1,000 of their tenured teachers (Greenblatt, 2010).
The vast preponderance of public school districts in the United States have long granted K-12 educators with tenure status. After a probationary period which most typically lasts two or three years, teachers are eligible to be granted tenure (Making the Grade, 2012). Most commonly, school boards of education vote on a teacher's tenure status based on recommendation of the school administrators and commonly must meet a set of criteria or standards (Brill, 2011). In some instances, however, tenure is granted automatically which occurs if a school board fails to take timely action to suspend the services of a probationary teacher or administrator, in which case the individual will attain tenure by estoppel (Wamsley v East Ramapo Central School District, 281 A.D.2d 633). Currently in most states, according to the National Council on Teacher Quality, tenure provides a level of job protection that makes it extremely difficult to terminate teachers for the duration of their careers (Making the Grade, 2012).

In recent years, tenure reform has become a common occurrence and more than a dozen states have reformed their original tenure laws in the face of school districts, as well as reformers and politicians insisting on greater teacher accountability, which is demonstrated via students’ academic performance (Darden, 2012).

**Theoretical Framework**

**Social judgment theory.** In this study, Social Judgment Theory is used as the theoretical framework for investigating teachers’ perceptions of tenure processes and practices in their own K-12 school district, as well as reform initiatives to revise current tenure practices across the country. Social Judgment Theory posits that the extent to which a person agrees with a particular position on an issue, as well as how important that issue is to the person affects his or her opinions about the issue. (Sherif & Sherif, 1967). An
underlying premise of Social Judgment Theory is that individuals have varying degrees of
openness to new ideas about specific subjects given how close these ideas are to the
person’s established belief system (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). Social Judgment Theory
classifies individual judgments into three categories and contends that when considering
an issue individuals demonstrate acceptance, non-commitment, or rejection toward the
issue being considered. According to the theory, individuals present varying levels of
acceptance, non-commitment, and rejection ranging from strong to moderate to mild
(Sherif & Sherif, 1967). Sherif and Hovland (1961) asserted that an individual’s loyalty to
his or her opinion might alter if situations or circumstances change. Additionally, Social
Judgment Theory contends that individuals who belong to social, political or professional
groups often develop ‘groupthink,’ meaning, that membership within the group leads to the
individual’s agreement with the majority’s viewpoint more often than not (Sherif &
Hovland, 1961).

Social Judgment Theory posits five basic principles relating to how perceptions,
opinions and attitudes are conveyed, judged, and modified (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). The
first principle of Social Judgment Theory is that individuals respond to incoming
information based on one of the three pre-established categories of judgment (Sherif &
Hovland, 1961). This principle declares that, for example, when individuals encounter a
situation they make judgments either along a continuum ranging from acceptable to
unacceptable, or hold no significant opinion about the topic and this principle holds for the
other two categories of judgment as well. (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). Sherif & Sherif (1967)
labeled these ranges the latitude of acceptance, the latitude of rejection, and the latitude of
non-commitment. An individual’s anchor position is defined as his or her single most
favored position and is limited to positions within the latitude of acceptance (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). The second principle of Social Judgment Theory declares that when evaluating information, individuals determine the category of judgment, and latitude to which it belongs. According to Sherif and Hovland (1961), favorable views most likely fall within the latitude of acceptance, unfavorable views fall within the latitude of rejection, and views that represent no significant opinion either way are located within the latitude of non-commitment. The third principle of Social Judgment Theory relates to personal relevance and maintains that the level of personal involvement or experience an individual has with an issue affects the individual’s acceptance, non-commitment, or rejection of the issue or opinion (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). For instance, according to Social Judgment Theory the level of direct personal involvement teacher participants in this study have with tenure practices will affect their acceptance, non-commitment, or rejection of issues and opinions related to tenure within their school district and possibly on a broader, national scope, as well. Specifically, participants in this study all had direct experience and involvement with tenure practices, as opposed to individuals outside of the profession of education, who likely have opinions related to the issue, but lack the personal involvement with tenure practices in K-12 education. According to the fourth principle of Social Judgment Theory, individuals alter or distort incoming information to fit their existing categories of judgment and their anchor point (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). The fifth principle of the theory declares that the existence of small to moderate discrepancies between an individual’s anchor position and the one being advocated by an outside source may influence an individual’s openness to change; whereas, large discrepancies will not (Sherif & Hovland, 1961).
Sherif & Sherif (1967) noted that a key implication of Social Judgment Theory is that persuading individuals to make significant changes in their opinions and viewpoints is difficult to accomplish. Additionally, Sherif & Sherif (1967) suggested that even successful attempts at persuasion would result in diminutive changes in attitude.

Social Judgment Theory maintains that people may have a range of non-mutually exclusive opinions regarding a given subject, but that they will have an anchor position (O'Keefe, 1990). Furthermore, O'Keefe (1990) declared that individuals' anchor positions are generally tied to their identity, as well as to the personal or professional affiliations they hold, and subsequently, it is difficult to change these anchor positions. Participants in this study were given the opportunity to describe their range of opinions regarding tenure practices from a first-hand perspective within their own school district. Additionally, participants were asked to share their viewpoints concerning national tenure practices and tenure reform efforts. Using the framework of Social Judgment Theory, the study identifies the perceptions and judgments of tenured K-12 educators regarding tenure practices, as well as consistencies and discrepancies between opinions of tenure within the school district and opinions related to national issues involving tenure and tenure reform. Social Judgment Theory will serve as a lens for examining commonalities in the opinions and perceptions of individuals who belong to a common professional group, in this case public educators. While on a broad scope the opinions of teachers related to tenure practices are lacking from the current literature, this study allowed the researcher to examine if the individual opinions of participants are indicative of ‘groupthink’ and reflect agreement with the views expressed by the other participants in the study as posited by Social Judgment
Theory given that all participants are tenured teachers in the same school district (Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

Social Judgment Theory is well suited to be utilized as a theoretical framework for the purposes of this study, as it will provide the researcher with a lens for investigating the participants’ preferred anchor position regarding tenure practices in K-12 education, both locally within their school district, and nationally as it relates to tenure reform (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). Moreover, Social Judgment Theory is an appropriate framework for this research study, as the theory posits the conditions under which an individual may be willing to go outside of his or her preferred position and express opinions that do not align with those of the larger group to which he or she is affiliated (in this case other tenured-teacher participants in the study) (O’Keefe, 1990). Specifically, in the analysis of responses, this researcher will gain insights about how closely participants’ anchor positions about tenure practices within their own K-12 educational setting and experiences are congruent with those same participants’ anchor positions related to national tenure reform agendas. Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall (1965) contended that when presented with a particular issue; such as national tenure reform initiatives, prior to forming opinions a person considers his or her pre-existing opinions and experiences related to that particular issue; in this case tenure practices within the individual’s school district. The researcher sought to determine participant’s anchor position related to tenure practices through analyzing the responses to the series of questions in the first interview, which related to personal experiences regarding tenure practices within the participants’ school district (O’Keefe, 1990). During the second interview the researcher further investigated the acceptance and rejection participants conveyed regarding tenure
issues on a national scale (Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall, 1965). The third interview of this study allowed the researcher to verify the accuracy of the data transcribed from the first two interviews. During the third interview the researcher inquired about uncertainties regarding participants’ responses to previous interview questions as they related to acceptance, rejection or non-commitment, clarified anchor positions and made necessary adjustments needed to insure that the study is reflective of the true intent of the individual participants and to make certain that discrepancies or uncertainties did not exist (Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

Research Central Question and Sub-questions

The central question. The primary and central research focus for this study is to address the question, “What are tenured teachers’ perceptions of tenure in K-12 education?” Five participants were interviewed to explore this question.

Sub-questions. The overarching central question was investigated via three sub questions. The sub questions were examined through a series of interviews with the five teacher participants.

Benefits of teacher tenure. The first sub-question seeks to understand from the teachers’ perspectives, “What aspects do tenured educators accept and view as the benefits of current tenure practices?” Within this question, teachers shared their positive direct, personal experiences with tenure practices within K-12 education.

Drawbacks of teacher tenure. The second sub-question for the study investigates, “What aspects do tenured educators reject and view as the drawbacks of current tenure practices?” Within this question, teachers shared their negative personal experiences or
concerns that they have identified with current tenure practices within K-12 education based on their first-hand involvement as tenured teachers.

**Tenure reform.** The last sub-question for the study explores, “What are tenured educators’ opinions, acceptance and rejections regarding tenure reform agendas and the prevalent criticisms of tenure in K-12 education?” For the purposes of this sub-question, teacher participants were asked to share their views and opinions related to tenure reform initiatives and specific events related to tenure reform that have occurred nation-wide.

**Introducing the Participants**

The study participants are all certified teachers in a rural school district in Northern New York State. Three female and two male teachers were interviewed for the study and all participants are full time, tenured teachers in the K-12 educational setting. Participants teach at the elementary, middle and high school levels, respectively and all participants have earned Master’s Degrees. Additionally, all participants voluntarily partook in the study and willingly responded to questions regarding their experiences and opinions about current tenure practices in K-12 education. The dialogue was open-ended and participants were encouraged to elaborate or skip questions, as needed.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the perceptions of tenured K-12 educators in a New York State school district regarding the practice and process of tenure, as well as tenure reform initiatives. Through open-ended interview questions, this qualitative study seeks to provide a voice for teachers within the field regarding their concerns, perceptions and views related to K-12 tenure practices.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to investigate teachers’ perceptions of tenure practices the literature review focuses on research related to: perceptions of tenure practices, current tenure practices in K-12 education, reform initiatives related to tenure, as well as teacher efficacy and tenure status.

Perceptions of Tenure Practices

While the literature representing teachers’ perceptions of tenure is limited, an examination of the existing literature revealed that while most educators in K-12 settings are eligible for, and receive tenure status, some teachers question the efficacy of the practice. Hess and West (2007) found that seventy-eight percent of teachers reported that there are at least a few tenured teachers in their schools who do not exhibit adequate classroom performance, yet are protected by their tenure status. Additionally, the majority (58%) of teachers suggested that earning tenure did not necessarily mean that the tenured teachers have worked hard and have proven themselves to be highly skilled (Hess & West, 2007). According to a study conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, (2012) 89% of teachers surveyed concurred that tenure should reflect evaluations of teacher effectiveness, and 92% of teacher participants indicated that tenure should not protect ineffective teachers. Furthermore, 80% of teachers in the study stated that tenure should be reevaluated at various intervals in a teacher’s career (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). Moreover, a Washington-based think tank called Education Sector conducted a national survey during the fall of 2011 and findings contend that more than 40 percent of teachers want their unions to concentrate more on teacher performance and student achievement than they presently do (Colvin, 2013).
While teacher tenure is a common practice in K-12 education, not all teachers support the procedures and practices related to tenure. The next section discusses the literature related to teacher tenure in K-12 settings.

**K-12 Teacher Tenure**

A review of the literature revealed that critics of tenure note concerns and apprehension regarding the long standing practice of granting tenure to teachers in K-12 education and the consequent job security it affords, regardless of the quality of their professional performance (Reeder, 2008, Klein 2011, Hannaway & Rotherham 2010, Thibodeaux, 2011). Tenure serves two distinct functions, which include providing job security that ultimately attracts and retains dynamic, high quality teachers in spite of comparatively lower pay, and secondly protection of educators from harmful political powers that could potentially be detrimental to organizational performance (Snowden, 2009).

Darden (2012) asserts that while tenure policies and laws vary in each state, commonly full-time teachers are divided into two categories; probationary and tenured. In most states, after approximately three to five years educators are eligible for the heightened job protection that comes with being granted tenure (Darden, 2012). Once granted tenure, it is unlikely that a teacher will be dismissed unless there are high levels of insubordination, immoral character often involving criminal charges, conduct unbecoming of a professional and often involving criminal charges, neglect of duty often resulting in student injury or potential injury and failure to maintain certification (Darden, 2012). Several steps must be taken before terminating a tenured K–12 teacher including notice of the discharge action, an opportunity to retort and present evidence, representation by legal
counsel, a written decision from the individual that initiated the dismissal, a right to appeal and the right to judicial review (Hindera & Josephson, 1998). Additionally, further steps, or specific timelines may be delineated and required based on the contractual agreement between the teachers’ union and the individual school district’s Board of Education and Superintendent (Darden, 2012).

Reeder (2008) contended that many underperforming teachers remain employed, noting that the cost of removing an underperforming tenured teacher can range from $200,000 to $400,000 in legal and arbitration fees. In addition, it is typical for tenured teachers to continue to be paid while the lengthy process of arbitration ensues, which could take up to five years, thus adding to the already high cost of the process (Klein, 2011). Over the past two decades in states where teacher tenure is granted, nearly 94% of school districts have never attempted to fire a tenured teacher (Reeder, 2008). Hannaway and Rotherham (2010) suggested that due to the obstacles presented by collective bargaining laws and the politics involved, many principals choose not to undertake the removal of a tenured teacher who is ineffective. The dismissals of tenured teachers that do occur are typically the result of gross misconduct or abusive behaviors (Reeder, 2008). Opponents of tenure argue that tenure may contribute to teacher complacency, because maintaining the status quo or less in some cases, does not lead to a teacher losing his or her job (Thibodeaux, 2011).

Lyons (2005) reported that proponents of tenure indicated that tenure attainment protects individuals from economic firing, which is increasingly important given the challenging fiscal landscape which schools across the country are facing. Teacher tenure assures that the jobs of experienced and more costly teachers are not eliminated only to be
replaced by less experienced, educators merely as a cost saving measure (Lyons, 2005). In most states, teachers undergo a three year probationary evaluation period, and during that timeframe, pedagogy, instructional methods and a variety of performance indicators are typically monitored and evaluated (Thibodeaux, 2011). Consequently, it can be argued that a practitioner’s performance and abilities can be adequately assessed ensuring that only dedicated and motivated educators are ultimately granted tenure (Thibodeaux, 2011).

**Tenure Reform Initiatives**

Teacher tenure was devised in the early 1900s as a set of practical protections to shield educators from unfair and arbitrary termination of employment (Kersten, 2006). Currently, concerns about the effect on student performance and achievement, along with economic constraints, dominate education reform deliberations (Ableidinger, Hassel & Kowal, 2011).

In recent years, tenure reform and gained a great deal of public attention, as well as notable traction in state legislatures across the United States (Piazza, 2014). Nearly two-thirds of states within the United States have changed their teacher evaluation, tenure and dismissal policies since 2010, at least slightly in order to be more aligned with a model in public education where employees’ job security is linked more closely to job performance (McGuinn, 2012a).

Over the past two decades, states have begun to address reforming tenure practices in various ways including the elimination of the term tenure from the law, tightening the due process timelines for potential removal of tenured teachers, and abbreviating the hearings and appeals processes required to remove ineffective or incompetent teachers (Christie & Sinth, 2011). Commonly proposed modifications include both restructuring
tenure protections and increasing the rigor of the process involved in being granted tenure (McGuinn, 2010). Christie and Zinth (2011) reported that other tenure reform initiatives have stipulated the collective bargaining process as a means of determining the viability of dismissal at the local school district level. More recently however, proposed changes to tenure legislation have become more stringent, with an increasing number of states beginning to propose completely rewriting their laws related to teacher tenure and distinguishing between renewal and dismissal during the term of a contract (Christie & Zinth, 2011). Furthermore, Christie and Zinth (2011) reported that state legislators have begun to legally require schools to not only incorporate teacher performance evaluations into decisions about granting tenure status, but also mandate parameters for dismissal of teachers with a series of negative performance evaluations, including those with tenure status. Ableidinger, Hassel and Kowal (2011) asserted that a focus on refining the quality, accuracy, and rigor of teacher evaluations have reinforced the idea of employment decisions based on performance, and simultaneously have powered greater interest in tenure reform. Furthermore, there has been a shift in the thinking of educational leaders which has evolved from pondering whether to reform teacher tenure in K-12 education to instead contemplating how to reform teacher tenure in K-12 education (Ableidinger, Hassel & Kowal, 2011).

In regard to how to reform current K-12 tenure systems, several states have taken the initial steps. In Florida, Governor Scott signed a measure that will lead to teacher tenure being gradually phased out and will also implement merit pay for teachers and principals (Cavanagh, 2011). Cavanagh (2011) cited that in Indiana a new law necessitates that school districts implement a teacher evaluation system, which factors in student
achievement and performance, rather than longevity, when considering pay increases. In Idaho newly adopted laws declare that a minimum of 50 percent of teachers' and administrators' formal evaluations must be grounded in student achievement (Cavanagh, 2011). Additionally, in Idaho educators are able to earn higher salaries when significant increases to student achievement are evident or they are willing to fill hard-to-staff positions. A recently adopted Minnesota law sanctions the state’s Board of Teaching to approve unconventional approaches for licensure for aspiring teachers, rather than the traditional tenure approach that has been utilized previously (Cavanagh, 2011).

Furthermore, legislation in Illinois was devised with some union support, which links teacher tenure and professional advancement and layoffs to performance evaluations (Cavanagh, 2011).

In a study, The Widget Effect, which was conducted by The New Teacher Project, researchers investigated current tenure practices, as well as suggestions that school leaders who participated in the study believed would be efficacious in the arena of tenure reform (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009). Suggested reform initiatives included an increased focus on teacher performance appraisal, as well as a more efficient system for removing ineffective teachers from their classrooms (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009). One of the study participants who worked in the Springfield Public Schools suggested that teacher evaluation plays a leading role in tenure reform and indicated the “need to develop a succinct performance appraisal system that recognizes good work, helps marginal employees get better and identifies employees who should be dismissed due to their inability to improve. Student performance must be the driving force to improve our current systems” (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009, p. 45).
Ableidinger, Hassel & Kowal (2011) contended that states have limited authority in terms of their abilities to eliminate tenure status for educators who have already been tenured; however, suggest that states can evolve by insuring that tenure approaches for new teachers are revised in order to be aligned with the rigors and necessities of modern education. Additionally, Ableidinger, Hassel & Kowal (2011) asserted that the most successful conversions will pair tenure changes with occupational and pay opportunities that motivate current tenured teachers to voluntarily surrender tenure status and concentrate on demonstrating professional excellence consistently.

Ableidinger, Hassel and Kowal (2011) noted the existence of a momentous prospect for changing tenure’s influence is to make it but one of multiple incentives and opportunities for educators. The current nonselective tenure practices in K-12 settings do not attract, influence or maintain better teachers; however, comparatively other rewards for superior educators could (Ableidinger, Hassel & Kowal, 2011). Ableidinger, Hassel and Kowal (2011) advocated that incentives could commence as early as during the first year of teaching for high performing teachers, and effectively last the duration of teaching careers for those educators who are able to sustain and cultivate their contributions. A variety of incentive options exist and could potentially be in the form of opportunities to teach more students in exchange for additional pay, reduction of non-instructional duties to enable reaching more students and decision-making power over hiring, promotion and tenure of others (Ableidinger, Hassel and Kowal, 2011). Additionally, Ableidinger, Hassel and Kowal (2011) suggest that opportunities for teachers to supervise or manage other teachers to improve their effectiveness, as well as taking leadership roles for professional development, coaching, and mentoring would foster a responsibility for other teachers and
a general sense of influence for high performing teachers. Other potential incentives could include title enhancement using distinctions such as advanced, master and lead (Ableidinger, Hassel and Kowal, 2011). Walsh and Tracy (2005) encouraged fostering opportunities for teachers to participate in and lead policy and instructional practice reforms based on their first-hand experience. In addition, school districts could offer other recognition and rewards for sustained excellence in performance demonstrated through performance evaluations (Ableidinger, Hassel and Kowal, 2011). Hanushek (2008) suggested higher pay to reflect higher contributions to student outcomes both academically via their work inside the classroom and also in terms of extracurricular contributions.

When considering reforming current tenure practices leaders can make the largest impact on the educational field by increasing the rigor of the standards teachers must meet in order to be granted tenure status (Walsh & Tracy, 2005). Walsh and Tracy (2005) suggested reforming tenure practices by restricting the number of educators who are eligible to receive tenure, thus transforming tenure in K-12 education into an accolade that confers prominence and respect. Tenure reformers should consider enhancing the rigor by increasing the number of benchmarks being considered when evaluating job performance, as well as increasing the performance quality expectations for each benchmark and providing clarity about their relative weight decisions about tenure (Walsh & Tracy, 2005).

Most commonly, a widespread tenure reform initiative involves linking the criteria for being granted tenure to teacher evaluation systems, which is currently commencing in several states (Walsh & Tracy, 2005).
Teacher Efficacy and Tenure Status

Hanushek (2008) indicated that one potential explanation for past failures within K-12 education is that significant attention has not been directed toward teacher quality and teacher effectiveness as it relates to tenure practices. Teacher effectiveness is a primary and integral component, which contributes to student achievement and research has established that the quality of teaching is the most substantial variable related to students' academic growth and achievement (Leithwoood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010; Stronge, 2003; Stronge & Hindman, 2006; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Hanushek (2008) asserted that students who have ineffective teachers are “damaged” (p. 8). Furthermore, he contended that, “They can probably recover from a single year of having a bottom five percent teacher, but a few years might lead to lasting problems – ones that dog the student for a lifetime (p. 8).”

A number of states currently have laws and regulations that allow for K-12 educators to be granted tenure after as few as two or three years of teaching (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2007). Hanushek (2008) suggested that these policies are inconsistent with the mission of providing a quality education to all students, because some students must necessarily be assigned to ineffective and damaging teachers who are protected by tenure status. Discussions about reforming policies related to teacher performance often concentrate on taking the currently available teachers and upgrading their effectiveness (Toch and Rothman, 2008). A variety of approaches intended to improve teacher quality have been the focus of much policy interest including induction programs, mentoring and professional development; however, critics argue that there is little evidence to suggest that these reform initiatives are effective, or that a current set of
underperforming teachers can be transformed into a more effective group (Toch and Rothman, 2008).

Hanushek (2008) asserted that improved and sustainable teacher quality would translate to substantially improved student achievement leading to gains in the Gross Domestic Product, which he contended would be sufficient to cover all of our expenditures on K-12 schooling. Hanushek (2008) indicated that in order to produce significant gains in student achievement, tenure policy reform must focus on the negative impacts on student achievement and ensure that the lowest performing 5-10 percent of the current distribution of teachers be eliminated permanently from the workforce.

A review of the literature revealed that teachers have a tremendous impact on students’ achievement, performance and overall conceptual understanding. The difference in achievement between a student who is taught by a teacher who is ineffective and not motivated versus a strong, dedicated educator can be as much as a grade level's worth of learning (Winters, 2009). Darling-Hammond (as cited in Ryan & Cooper, 2009) also contended that teacher quality is a powerful predictor of student performance. Based on their research, Stronge, Ward & Grant (2011) asserted that effective teachers leverage a “particular set of attitudes, approaches, strategies, or connections with students that manifest themselves in non-academic ways (positive relationships, encouragement of responsibility, classroom management, and organization) and that lead to higher achievement” (p. 350). The literature also revealed the important connections between student performance and differentiated lesson and materials presentation and between student achievement and teachers’ use of higher order questioning techniques (Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2007). Thibodeaux (2011) noted that critics of teacher tenure
practices in K-12 education focus discussions on teacher quality and the potential for tenure to protect underperforming teachers, which is significant given that teachers play a critical role in both influencing and promoting student achievement.

**Summary**

The literature reviewed is reflective of the idea that the merits of current K-12 tenure practices are being probed by researchers; however, teachers’ opinions are not extensively represented within the literature. The merits of tenure are becoming the source of growing debate in an era characterized by increased accountability and a focus on improved student achievement (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). While proponents of tenure note that tenure status prevents unfair employment practices and allows teachers greater instructional freedom, recent controversy surrounding tenure has served as an impetus for discussions about developing more stringent and rigorous requirements for attaining tenure (Thibodeaux, 2011). Proponents and reformers alike, assert that the primary goal of the tenure granting process is ultimately ensuring that it leads to overall quality improvements and assurances within the field of education (Ableidinger, Hassel & Kowal, 2011). Some states including New Jersey have considered and enacted legislation which moves toward eradicating teacher tenure, and Georgia legislators were successful in eliminating tenure for teachers who are new to the field (Robinson, 2008). Through this research study the researcher investigated teachers’ perspectives of the tenure process and reform efforts related to tenure practices given that these views are not sufficiently or comprehensively reflected in the current research literature.
Chapter 3: Qualitative Methodology

Problem Statement

Debates about teacher accountability have raised questions about the practice of granting tenure to teachers in K-12 education, which is a common practice in public schools in the United States, and in quintessence bestows job security, irrespective of work ethic or quality of performance (Barnett & McCormick, 2003).

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology to allow the researcher to investigate teacher perceptions of the practices and processes related to tenure in K-12 education in an in-depth manner. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) described a qualitative research paradigm as a basis for comprehension and for interpreting reality. To that end, through a qualitative evaluation this researcher investigated and documented the varied opinions and viewpoints reported by tenured teachers pertaining to current tenure practices utilized in K-12 education. The investigation provides insights into teachers’ interpretations and assessments of K-12 tenure given that an in-depth qualitative view of teacher perceptions is not well represented in the current literature.

Research Design

The study utilizes a basic inductive approach in order to examine teacher perceptions of the current practices affiliated with tenure in K-12 education. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) emphasized that qualitative researchers base their investigations on the premise that "the world is made up of multiple realities" involving unique views of the same situation (p. 15). Qualitative researchers are concerned with developing an understanding of events and situations from the perspective of participants (Fraenkel,
Wallen, and Hyun, 2012). Thomas (2007) noted that a general inductive approach provides efficient and systematic procedures for analyzing qualitative data capable of producing reliable and valid findings. Furthermore, utilizing inductive analysis for the purposes of this qualitative study allowed the researcher to identify concepts and themes through interpretations of the data being collected (Thomas, 2007). Given that this is a relatively un-researched area, a basic inductive methodology allowed the researcher to obtain a better understanding of participants’ perceptions of K-12 tenure practices and examine broader generalizations based on an interpretation of the data, and to identify patterns and trends in the data (Trochim, 2006).

**Research Tradition**

A general inductive approach was utilized within the exploratory research study to allow the researcher to investigate teachers’ perceptions of tenure practices both within their school district, as well as in K-12 education, at large. Thomas (2007) contended that using an inductive approach allows research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data. Furthermore, an inductive approach to qualitative research allows researchers to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a summary format, to establish links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data, and to identify the underlying structure of experiences which are evident in the raw data (Thomas, 2007). The inductive approach was utilized in this qualitative study to determine trends, patterns and anomalies within and across participants’ responses. One limitation of the study is that all participants were obtained from a single school district; however, the investigation in this school district may serve as a first step to future research regarding teacher perceptions of tenure practices.
Additionally, the researcher’s personal biases resulting from nearly a decade of service as a school principal and evaluator of teachers may also be seen as a limitation of the study. The researcher’s intent is to report the perceptions of teachers participating in the study, rather than her own opinions. A further potential limitation of this study is that factors outside of tenure practices, such as leadership, available resources within the school district, or previous training may influence participants’ opinions; however, research questions were designed to focus participants solely and exclusively on current tenure practices in K-12 education.

**Statement of Positionality**

When conducting qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to be cognizant that her own experiences, biases and opinions could permeate the work. It is therefore, essential to reveal the background of the researcher.

The researcher has worked as both a teacher and school administrator for the last 15 years in public and private K-12 school settings. The perspective of the researcher related to teacher tenure and teacher quality relates to her role in teacher supervision, evaluation, recommending tenure approval or denial and aspiring to facilitate the professional growth and development of both probationary and tenured teachers under her supervision.

During the researcher’s years in various school settings, she has been involved in frank, candid dialogue with a variety of teachers who both support and oppose the current K-12 tenure practices. The varying viewpoints that the researcher has been privy to over the years, was the impetus for her interest in this topic, as the viewpoints of teachers is significantly lacking from the current literature and in many instances; assumptions about
teachers’ opinions are made. It was the intent of the researcher, and prodigious attention and care was taken to ensure that the viewpoints and opinions reflected within this study are those of the participants and not in any way modified, influenced or enhanced by the researcher.

**Participants**

The sampling strategy employed for this study was purposive and included tenured teachers who are all employed within the same school district. The research site was a school district located within a rural community in Northern New York State. Over the past five years the district has faced significant budgetary cuts and consequently a great deal of programmatic reduction, as well as the elimination of 26 teaching positions.

The sample of participants included five tenured teachers and participation was voluntary. Participants were randomly selected from a pool of teachers who responded to an email message which described the study and asked for volunteers to participate. In order to encourage open and honest responses, participants were reassured that their confidentiality would be maintained and that there was no risk of retaliatory action as a result of sharing their opinions. All participants were assigned pseudonyms for the purposes of the study.

**Limitations of the Study**

While the study seeks to provide an in-depth and detailed analysis of the viewpoints, opinions and attitudes of tenured teachers about tenure practices in K-12 schools, there are limitations to the study. The primary limitation of the study is that the participants were selected from one school district; however, there was intentionality in selecting participants from one school district, as it ensured that they had all experienced
similar tenure practices and had a common frame of reference. A future study may compare the opinions of teachers from multiple districts about tenure practices given that their experiences may vary depending on the school district of employment. Ultimately, the potential limitation may serve as an impetus for future research.

**Recruitment and Access**

To select participants for this study, the researcher used purposive sampling, by determining potential participants who are employed and who are tenured within a public school in Northern New York. A total of five tenured teachers were sought for the purposes of the study. Once potential participants were identified, the researcher sent an email to all those who met the criteria of being full time employees within the district who have been granted tenure status. The email message provided a brief explanation of the interview process and asked for volunteer participants. Additionally, potential participants were asked to rate their familiarity with national tenure reform as very familiar, somewhat familiar or not familiar. This screening mechanism allowed the researcher to select study participants who have at least some familiarity with national tenure reform initiatives, which is the topic discussed in the second interview. Participants were randomly selected from the pool of volunteers meeting the criteria. No compensation was offered to participants; however, this researcher indicated a willingness to share findings with all participants via a copy of the researcher’s dissertation. Informed consent was sought from participants and this researcher provided relevant and pertinent facts about the study at the time consent was requested. The researcher sought and was granted IRB approval based on the premise that participants will incur minimal risk by participating in this research study.
Data Collection

Given the researcher's recognition of the potential controversy and political nature of the topic of tenure, participant confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the course of the investigation to ensure that teacher participants were able to express their honest opinions without fear of retribution. Turner (2010) asserted that interviews provide researchers with in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic. To that end, the researcher conducted a series of interviews with five teachers who have been granted tenure, in order to discover and document their experiences and viewpoints related to tenure practices as well as opinions related to tenure reform initiatives. Turner (2010) declared that the standardized open-ended interview is extremely structured in terms of the wording of the questions. While participants were asked identical questions, the questions are worded to encourage responses that are open-ended and allowed participants to contribute as much information and detail as they saw fit (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Therefore, interviews for the study included the same questions for all participants in order to maintain consistency.

The first two open-ended interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format and all interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. The first two interviews took place in a neutral location selected by the participants based on their convenience. The third interview served to clarify and allow participants to elaborate upon data collected during the first two interviews, and was limited to 30 minutes or less, in the interest of avoiding a concern noted by IRB about overtaxing the participants after the first two lengthy interviews. To that end, for the third interview, participants were able to choose either a face-to-face interview or a Skype interview; however, all participants chose
to participate in the third interview in person, rather than via Skype. Data obtained from
the series of completed interviews was analyzed for common themes, as well as outlying
responses that emerged when the responses were compared. The study examined and
identified tenured public school teachers’ perceptions of tenure practices in K-12
education, and thus common themes and outlying responses were reported in an effort to
fully represent the multiple perspectives of each of the individual teachers who
participated in the study (Creswell, 2007).

Each participant participated in three interviews and data triangulation across the
three data collection instances served to increase the credibility and validity of the study
results. In the first interview, participants were asked to share their perceptions of tenure
practices in K-12 education based on their own lived experiences as educators by
responding to a series of questions (See Appendix A). The first interview took
approximately one hour to complete. A second interview was conducted with each
participant at which time they were asked to provide their perceptions of tenure reform
initiatives and proposals by responding to a series of questions related to national current
events involving tenure and tenure reform. The second interview took approximately one
hour to complete (See Appendix A). The researcher made the deliberate decision to isolate
questions related to personal experiences with tenure in the first interview and questions
which focus on national current events, and reform agendas related to tenure in the second
interview. Isolating the local and national aspects of topics related to tenure was based on
the assumption that by segregating questions related to personal experience with tenure
from responsive questions about tenure issues on a national scale would allow participants
to focus their responses accordingly. Additionally, the focused interviews provided the
researcher with insights about whether teachers’ opinions and perceptions related to tenure practices within their school district agree or conflict with their views of tenure and reform initiatives on a larger scale. Following the first two interviews, data was analyzed and a final interview was conducted with each of the study participants. The final interview allowed the researcher to confirm the data collected from the first two interviews, and seek clarification and elaboration regarding teachers’ initial responses, as needed. During the third interview, participants were not asked for information outside of the scope of the questions from the first two interviews (included in Appendices A and B), as the intent of the third interview was solely to seek additional details or essential clarity, based on the analysis of the data from the initial two interviews; however, they were asked to clarify their anchor position as it relates to tenure practices in K-12 tenure overall. Additionally, as directed by IRB, in an effort to avoid overtaxing participants, each participant was sent an email in advance noting the themes and needed clarifications, so that the conversation within the third interview could be as brief as possible. Unlike the first two interviews which lasted about one hour each, the final interview was brief with a duration of approximately 30 minutes for each of the participants.

The interviews. The series of interviews took place with each of the participants individually, in locations and at times determined based on what was most convenient for the individual teachers who voluntarily contributed to the study. All participants were reminded that their responses were completely confidential prior to beginning each of the interviews. All of the questions asked within all three interviews were open-ended and were asked in a manner that encouraged participants to fully and comprehensively elaborate on their experiences or opinions, rather than answering with a yes or no
response. The open-ended nature of the interviews allowed participants to share what they felt was meaningful or relevant about their experiences with tenure practices. Furthermore, participants were assured that at any point they could refuse to answer a question or end the interview entirely, if they felt uncomfortable or had concerns with the way the interview was progressing or their participation in the study. Nonetheless, the five participants in the study provided detailed responses to all of the questions that were asked within each of the interviews. Additionally, all participants completed the entire series of three interviews that were included within the scope of the study.

The first interview focused primarily on the participants’ first-hand experiences with teacher tenure in K-12 education within their school district. During the second interview, participants were asked to share their opinions related to five national tenure reform scenarios, which are described in detail within Chapter 4. The third and final interview was intended to clarify and validate information collected within the first two interviews.

**Transcription and validation.** Upon completion of the interviews, the voice recordings of the series of interview were transcribed within a Microsoft word document file by the researcher. Files were saved in duplicate form and the second file was used for the purposes of data coding. The series of interviews as well as the subsequent transcriptions were completed within a two month period of time. No one outside of the researcher was granted access to the recordings, assisted with transcription, or had access to the transcribed data files at any time throughout the study.
**Data Storage**

Interview recordings are stored in password protected computer files and are labeled numerically by participant, rather than by name to insure confidentiality. Interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word, and are also stored on a password protected computer. In addition to being saved to a secure server, all data files were backed up on a USB key, which remains locked in a secure file cabinet when not in use. Access to the data will be limited to the researcher. All data will be destroyed one year after the conclusion of the researcher's oral defense of her dissertation.

**Data Confidentiality**

Identifying personal information such as participant’s actual names were intentionally excluded from the transcriptions to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Once the study has concluded and the resulting dissertation has been defended at Northeastern University, all of the recordings as well as the electronic documents containing data which is related to the study will be deleted or destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

Turner (2010) noted that the final component in the interview process is that of interpreting the data that was collected through the series of interviews. Data analysis allows the researcher to create meaning from what has been discovered throughout the study by compiling the information into sections or groups which are classified as themes or codes (Creswell, 2003, 2007). The researcher identified the emergence of theme or codes, which were characterized by consistent phrases, expressions, or ideas that were common amongst the responses of participants in the study (Kvale, 2007). In accordance
with Creswell’s (2009) approach, data collected within this study involved multiple levels of analysis. After transcription, the participants’ responses to all interview questions were read and reviewed to provide the researcher with a general sense of what participants had verbalized, and margin notes were made by the researcher which reflected general thoughts about the data and potential commonalities or discrepancies (Creswell, 2009). Subsequently, the data was coded by clustering the information based on commonalities, as well as unique and exclusive ideas reflected about tenure practices in K-12 education. Holloway (1997) declared that thick description refers to the researcher making patterns explicit from the detailed account of field experiences that are shared by the participants. Thick description was utilized for the purposes of this study to ensure that sufficient detail was provided and patterns and themes which emerged are sufficiently represented within the findings. A narrative passage was used to convey the findings that emerged from the data analysis and to demonstrate how perceptions related to tenure are organized for the purposes of the study.

Given that multi-dimensionality is implicit in Social Judgment Theory, investigations of participants’ responses include analysis of participants’ acceptance, rejection and anchor positions related to various aspects of tenure in K-12 education. In instances when the researcher lacked clarity or had uncertainty about participants’ acceptance, rejection, or anchor position based on their initial responses within the first and second interviews, clarity and understanding was sought during the third and final interview.

Data coding. Qualitative data collected via interviews is rich and thick, which can result in the processes of data analysis and coding becoming cumbersome for the researcher given the need to scrutinize the narrative responses, and correctly reflect an
overall perspective through the coding process (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). Creswell (2007) notes that a probable weakness with open-ended interviews is that there is the potential for difficulty given the arduous nature of coding the data.

The data coding and representation of data within the study are in alignment with Creswell’s (2007) recommended approach for dealing with data analysis and representation. Creswell (2007) explained an effective three step analysis strategies for coding and ultimately representing qualitative data (p. 148): Step #1: Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data, Step #2: Reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes Step #3: representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. To that end, once the participants’ responses were analyzed and organized in themes, the researcher displayed the emerging patterns and outlying responses in tabular, as well as narrative form.

**Themes.** As a result of analyzing the data through the process of coding, themes were identifiable from the interview responses. The evident themes are detailed and discussed within the finding section of this research paper. The researcher exercised great care to ensure that the themes explicated are representative of the teacher’s voice regarding K-12 tenure practices and policies as shared by the participants in this study.

**Trustworthiness**

The nature of the research topic presents a threat to internal validity, given the researcher’s role and years of experience as a school administrator. To mitigate this threat, within the study, the researcher consistently utilizes identical open-ended questions for all interviews, which were conducted in a standardized manner. At no point did the researcher share her personal views or opinions regarding any of the subject matter with
participants. Additionally, the teachers participating in the study were not teachers whom the researcher was responsible for supervising, nor were they individuals whom the researcher had engaged in prior discussions regarding K-12 tenure practices.

Validity was enhanced by the fact that one researcher coded and clustered all of the data, thus ensuring that a consistent approach to analysis minimized shifts in definitions of codes.

Protection of Human Subjects

Both at the start of each interview, as well as intermittently throughout the interviews, the researcher inquired with the participants about their level of comfort and fatigue. Additionally, the researcher offered participants the opportunity to take breaks at various points during the interviews. Participants were also informed that they could refuse to answer any question, or cancel participation at any point, if they felt uncomfortable, unwilling or unable to participate in the study.

Given that the researcher was a school principal within the school district being studied, it is acknowledged that the researcher's professional role may have influenced participants’ responses. In the interest of candid dialogue, in addition to strictly maintaining and assuring participants of the confidentiality of their responses, none of the study participants were teachers who were directly supervised by the researcher.

Confidentiality. The participants involved in this research study are not identified by their actual names and pseudonyms were assigned to each of the participants. Furthermore, no identifying information in the form of names, dates, locations or events are included within the findings, analysis or report of the study. Participants were given an opportunity to view the transcription of the first two interviews prior to completing the
third interview to insure that they were comfortable with the information included regarding their backgrounds and interests, as well as opinions and viewpoints that they shared regarding tenure practices in K-12 education. At that time they were given the opportunity to eliminate any details that they felt could infringe upon maintaining confidential participation in the study.

**The IRB process.** The IRB approval process was initiated after the preliminary three chapters of this research study were approved. All correspondence and records were prepared in order to meet all General Criteria for IRB Approval of Research (45 CFR 46.111). A copy of the official certification is included within the appendices of this report (Appendix D).

**Risks.** Throughout this study, to the largest extent possible and practical, all risks to human subjects’ participation were minimized. The selection of the human subjects was unbiased and appropriate given the nature and intent of the study. Additionally, at the urging of the IRB committee, participants were given the option of participating in the third interview via phone or Skype in order to avoid overtaxing the participants. Additionally, in the interest of avoiding overtaxing the participants, the third interview was brief and participants were informed of the questions that would be asked, as well as clarifications needed via email prior to the interview.

**Informed consent: prospective participants.** Informed consent was pursued and received from each prospective participant in accordance with and to the degree required by the Health and Human Services (HHS) regulations (45 CFR 46.116).
Results

Creswell (2009) stated that results of a qualitative study should present the themes identified and also convey the multiple perspectives of the participants. To that end, the study findings include detailed descriptions of the participants’ responses and related themes, as well as direct quotations and explanations provided throughout the interviews. Furthermore, in addition to a narrative format, descriptions are presented in tabular form in order to depict relevant themes relating to participants’ responses about teacher tenure. The findings of this study based on the analysis of the participants’ responses have also been linked to the original research questions that guided this study.

In conclusion, through this qualitative study the researcher aimed to reveal K-12 tenured teachers’ candid opinions and perspectives regarding their personal experiences with tenure practices in K-12 education, as well as national reform initiatives related to tenure.
Chapter 4: Findings

The professional teachers who were study participants all work in a small, rural school district, in Upstate New York. Each of the five participants held tenure status within the school district and participated voluntarily in the series of interviews.

All study participants indicated having a general knowledge of tenure practices within their school district, as well as with national tenure reform initiatives. The participants in the study were encouraged to share their in-depth, honest and candid views and opinions regarding K-12 tenure practices, throughout the series of the three interviews.

Interview Structure

The first interview focused solely on the participants’ personal experiences with tenure within the school district. During each of the hour-long, first-round interviews, questions concentrated on each participant’s individual experience and first-hand opinions regarding K-12 tenure practices. Each of the five participants was asked a series of questions about tenure practices within the school district, which asked for their views on topics ranging from positive aspects, examples of tenure being beneficial to the participant or a colleague, concerns or notable drawbacks, job security and local tenure reform initiatives. The open ended questions were general, which allowed for participants to share their thoughts and ideas freely, without limitations.

Within the second, hour-long interview participants were asked to share their views and reactions to very specific scenarios which have occurred across the United States involving tenure reform initiatives in K-12 education. Questions concentrated on teacher evaluations linked to student achievement, the Chicago Teacher Strike, a Gates’ study
findings suggesting tenure should be reevaluated at various intervals in a teacher’s career, tenure law reform in New Jersey, and private school tenure practices. Participants were given background information about each of the previous scenarios related to K-12 tenure practices across the United States and they were asked to share their opinions regarding each of the scenarios presented.

**Document review.** The background information provided to the participants regarding the scenarios related to national K-12 tenure practices, tenure reform initiatives and debates regarding tenure on a broad national scope was gleaned through the process of a thorough document review of each scenario.

The first national scenario that participants were asked to consider involved a 2011 survey by Harvard University's Program on Educational Policy and Governance (PEPG) entitled Driving School Reform. The study revealed that 55 percent of respondents favored awarding tenure on the basis of student progress and achievement on state tests (PEPG, 2011). Conversely, 20 percent of respondents opposed using student progress on state assessments for tenure decisions, and 25 percent neither favored nor opposed using student assessment data to make decisions about granting tenure (PEPG, 2011). The Harvard survey also investigated merit pay, school vouchers, technology education and globally competitive education among other topics related to education reform and improvements (PEPG, 2011).

The study participants were provided with information about the findings of the PEPG (2011) survey and asked to respond to the idea of tenure status being linked to teacher evaluations, which are based on student achievement data obtained from state assessments. Additionally, the teachers participating in the study were asked to identify
their perspectives of benefits and drawbacks related to linking tenure to student achievement data.

The second national tenure scenario that participants in the study were asked to consider related to the Chicago teacher strike. Greenhouse (2012) contended that the high-stakes teachers’ strike, which involved nearly 26,000 Chicago K-12 teachers, was the result of the teachers’ defensiveness in the face of reform, which focused on teacher quality and tenure protocols. Broadway (2010) indicated that one of the volatile issues related to the Chicago teachers’ strike was a proposed increase in the duration of the probationary period from two years to four years. Additionally, the proposal allowed school administrators much greater latitude to revoke a teacher’s tenure status based on inadequate job performance (Broadway, 2010). Furthermore, changes linking tenure status to teacher evaluation was cited as one of the reasons that the teachers in Chicago chose to go on strike in 2012 (Harshaw, 2012). School leaders and administrators countered that the current tenure practices protect ineffective teachers and prevent them from ensuring that the best educators are teaching in their schools (Greenhouse, 2012).

Study participants were asked to contemplate and share their opinions related to the debate between the teachers and the administrators in the Chicago case. Additionally, participants were asked to share their views regarding the claims that the existing tenure protocols in Chicago, and across the nation, potentially protect ineffective teachers by providing job security.

Another scenario that was presented to the participants focused on a study conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates’ Foundation in 2012, which surveyed teachers in K-12 education to obtain their views on education reform. The findings indicated that 80%
of teachers participating in the Gates’ study stated that tenure should be reevaluated at various intervals in a teacher’s career (Gates’ Foundation, 2012). The Gates’ Foundation study (2012) aimed to illuminate teachers’ opinions related to teacher quality and improving K-12 education in the United States.

The researcher shared information with the participants related to the Gates’ study, which suggested the vast majority of teachers supported reevaluation of tenure. Participants were asked to share their opinions regarding the notion of a teacher’s tenure status being reevaluated periodically at regular intervals, such as every 3 years, 5 years or 10 years.

The fourth scenario which study participants were asked to contemplate involved changes to New Jersey’s tenure laws. New Jersey’s tenure laws are over 100 years old, and classified as the oldest tenure laws within K-12 education in the country (O’Neil, 2012). In New Jersey, the tenure law has been modified so that teachers who receive two consecutive years of partially effective or ineffective evaluation ratings will lose their tenure status (Christie, 2012).

The participants in the study were asked to share their opinions related to the tenure reform in New Jersey. Additionally, study participants were asked to consider whether ineffective ratings earned by tenure teachers in K-12 education should have an effect on maintaining tenure status.

The last scenario that participants in the study were asked to consider involved comparing public school and private school tenure practices. Holley (2008) noted that the absence of teachers’ unions and teacher tenure in private school affords private school administrators with more discretion regarding the employment of teachers, who are at-will
employees. Additionally, proponents of eliminating tenure, note that tenure status is not granted in many highly rated private schools, and thus is not necessary in public school settings (Posner, 2012).

The study participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the notion that many prestigious K-12 private school function effectively without tenure, and therefore teacher tenure is not needed in K-12 public school settings either. In addition, participants were asked to elaborate on their opinion by providing a rationale for their viewpoint.

Based on a culmination of their prior knowledge, as well as the background information provided by the researcher, all participants in the study shared their perspectives and opinions relating to each of the five national tenure scenarios which were considered within the study.

The school district. While consistencies exist between school districts in the practices that surround tenure, different school districts have slight nuances or unique programs that are influenced by the school culture, financial resources, demographics or geographic factors.

The school district has one elementary school, one middle school and one high school, which exist within one centralized campus. Additionally within the same campus there is a central office, which houses the Superintendent’s office, as well as a human resource office. Given the close proximity of the school buildings, resources and staff are often shared amongst the schools.

The school district where the teachers in this study are employed serves children with great financial diversity. Given that the school district is surrounded by four local
colleges and universities, as well as a teaching hospital, many students come from affluent families who put a great emphasis on the quality and importance of their children’s educations. Additionally, the district is situated in a community where many of the services are provided for and accessible to low income families, including subsidized housing. Consequently, the school district serves many students who come from families who experience low income financial circumstances, or reside within impoverished households.

**Participant Profiles**

The tenured teachers, who participated in this study, teach varying grade levels and subject areas. Their years of service ranges from 8 – 19 years, and all participants have at least a Master’s degree. The general demographics of participants are reflected on Table 1. Additionally, the profiles, as well as the viewpoints of each participant regarding K-12 tenure practices are provided within this chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym In Study</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Area of Teaching</th>
<th>Number of Times Tenured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>B.S., M.S.</td>
<td>Special Education, Multiple Grades</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>B.S., M.S.</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoAnn</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>B.S., M.S., Ph. D.</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>B.S., M.S.</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>B.S., M.S.</td>
<td>Elementary, Special Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Matthew. Matthew has been teaching in the school district for 19 years and was granted tenure status after completing three years of professional service and has therefore been a tenured teacher for 15 years. He completed his undergraduate degree in music education at a private music college and then earned a Master’s degree in Special Education from a public SUNY college. He currently teaches Middle School Special Education in both inclusionary and self-contained classrooms. He has assisted with student dramatic and musical performances, and also serves as a building representative for the teacher’s union within the school district. In his free time, he enjoys playing in a local band and traveling.

Megan. Megan has worked in the school district for a total of eleven years. She spent her first two years employed as a teaching assistant and then taught fourth grade for a total of seven years. She is currently in her second year as a first grade teacher in the district. She has held tenure status for six years. She holds a dual undergraduate degree in education and sociology. She went on to complete her Master’s degree in K-12 Reading. She noted that she highly values and takes advantage of professional development, workshops, technology camps and math camps to the largest extent possible. She has also completed ongoing literacy coach training after school for the last couple of years, which she indicated has been very helpful to her as a first grade teacher. When she is not working she loves to cook and read.

JoAnn. JoAnn has been a biology and chemistry teacher at the high school within this school district for eight years. She has been tenured in the district for five years. She holds a Bachelor’s degree, Master’s degree and Ph.D. Prior to becoming employed by the school district, she taught in higher education as a science educator for 27 years at both
graduate and undergrad levels. She has worked at both community colleges and four year universities, and received tenure at two of the higher education institutions. She also held positions in higher education that were non-tenured track positions. In addition to her time in the classroom, she advises a club for girls interested in STEM. When she is not working she has a side business as a dessert chef.

**Eileen.** Eileen has been an elementary teacher for nearly 15 years and was granted tenure at the end of her third year as a full time teacher. Her undergraduate and graduate degrees are in Elementary Education. She noted that she took some time off when her children were born and also took a lengthy leave to assist her son who has autism, but otherwise she has remained employed within this district. She has taught at a few different grade levels, but has always remained at the elementary school level. She began working in the district as a substitute teacher and then filled a few maternity leaves before she was ultimately offered a full time position. She serves on a committee within the district to help assist rural families ensure they are helping to foster literacy development at home. She is an avid runner and marathoner. She also works with local autism charities.

**Michael.** Michael has been tenured twice in two different school districts. He has taught for 8 years between the two districts and was granted tenure in each of the school districts after three years of service, respectively. He holds New York State teaching certifications in both Special Education and Elementary Education after completing his undergraduate and graduate degree in these fields at the local SUNY teaching college. He also chose to focus his studies in the area of remedial reading, and completed a minor in literacy. Within the district, he assists with student council events such as charity
fundraisers and student activities. He describes himself as a sports’ fanatic and enjoys coaching a few of his children’s youth sports’ teams.

**Individual Dialogues**

The following narratives were amassed to elucidate the opinions, experiences and viewpoints of the five participants who took part in the study. The accounts draw principally from the participant’s own words, as ascertained throughout the interviews within the study with a paramount commitment to accurately and genuinely reflect the “Teacher’s Voice.”

**Matthew.** Matthew described the current tenure practices in the district where he is employed as “beneficial and rigorous.” He asserted that tenure insures that new teachers are learning the ropes of the teaching profession, and are also learning and meeting the expectations of the district. Matthew noted that a benefit of the process is that during the probationary time period teachers have a mentor teacher, who is a tenured teacher within the district. He explained that the new teachers are required to work with that mentor throughout each of the school years during the three year probationary period. Matthew indicated that there are also some well-developed, formal tenure preparation classes, which are beneficial to non-tenured teachers who are required to attend on a regularly scheduled basis. The tenure candidates are required to compile and present a tenure portfolio during their probationary periods, which are shared with the school board. Matthew explained that as part of the portfolio, letters of recommendations for tenure are included from other teachers and administrators, so that the school board has rationale for granting tenure. Matthew indicated that in his opinion a benefit of tenure is that it forces the district to provide supplemental supports such as mentors, development classes and
portfolio development to help support new teachers through the tenure process, but more importantly to assist them with professional growth as educators. He noted that the first few years of a teacher’s career are a time of tremendous growth and that the district has an obligation to support that growth.

Matthew explained his own experience, and noted, “I appreciated that tenure provided a recognition that I had been vested in the district by meeting the district’s expectations during the probationary period, which felt like an acknowledgement of my hard work and achievement.” He contended that tenure helps validate that a teacher is on the right track and that they are meeting the high standards for quality that are the expectations of both the school district and the state education department.

From Matthew’s perspective, another benefit of tenure is that it provides some academic freedom. He explained that teachers who are teaching history or the sciences where there might be differences in philosophy amongst staff, administrators or even a parent, tenure provides a protection by way of job security and subsequently allows for a more open dialogue within the classroom. In regards to academic freedom Matthew noted:

When I was teaching at the fifth grade level, I did a lot of co-teaching and as part of the science unit we taught a biological perspective on human sexuality, which can be a touchy subject. We were proactive in sending a letter home to parents and they had to sign a form indicating that they granted consent for their child learning about that particular topic. We also in that disclosure form indicated that parents were able to review any of the materials prior to the instruction, if they chose to. I did feel that once I had tenure status, it was an assurance that the district trusted me to
proceed responsibly when touching upon topics such as that in a way that was
developmentally appropriate.

Matthew indicated that via tenure he feels he has an authority, which allows him to represent differences in perspective, with a caveat of having an awareness of the developmental level of the students who he is working with, which influences how material is taught or how much depth is presented. Matthew noted, “Once a faculty member has achieved tenure status, I find that they are much more willing to voice their opinions about things happening in the school or new initiatives, whereas when they are not tenured they are more tight-lipped and aren’t as likely to share their perspectives as openly.”

Matthew shared his viewpoints when asked to identify some potential drawbacks of tenure practices in K-12 education:

I am really unable to identify any specific drawbacks with tenure practices within the school district based on my experiences. I think that if there is a specific instance of incompetence, tenure has very little to do with it. Even a high quality tenured teacher could be required to follow a performance improvement plan or participate in remedial action, if it would further enhance their professional abilities. I think it is the district’s and administrators’ responsibility to help an underperforming teacher to improve, but that tenured teacher’s job should not be placed in jeopardy if the district has failed to support him or her adequately.

When considering national tenure reform initiatives, and specifically utilizing student achievement data to evaluate teachers, Matthew explained only a portion of decisions about tenure being granted should be based on the performance of the students who are being compared to a normed group. Matthew noted that teacher evaluation which
are based on student achievement data must also take into consideration the particular population of students that each teacher is working with:

I work with students with mild to moderate learning disabilities and I would want the basis of growth to be more of a developmental scale in terms of where did they start on the pre-benchmark and how does that compare to where they end up on the post-benchmark in terms of their growth. It is also very tricky, because when you talk about students with special needs, the needs are unique and it is hard to do an at-large comparison of that populous to another populous because it is so individualized and the needs are more intensive, but I think assessment data needs to account for a portion of the tenure program.

Matthew contended that the benefit of using assessment data is that it provides an objective way of measuring growth and performance. Furthermore, he feels that if a teacher evaluation system using assessment data is set up accurately and is valid, it has the potential to shed light on the effectiveness of a teacher’s instruction.

Matthew noted that the drawbacks of linking tenure to student achievement relates to no two students being created equally. He explained that there are so many factors that have an effect on student performance, such as attendance. Matthew stated, “I have a student right now who displays great absenteeism, also there are students with impulsivity or disengagement with school, and it’s very hard to get a valid measure of how their performance relates to teacher effectiveness given the outside factors that are beyond the teachers control or influence.” He also described a student who refused to read the text passages on the state test that he needed to read in order to be able to answer the comprehension questions. Even after Matthew verbally prompted the student to read the
text, the student refused and randomly answered the questions with guesses and haphazard responses. Subsequently, Matthew contended, “It is hard to get an accurate measure in those instances and then having something like that have an effect on someone’s tenure status would be terribly unfair when it’s not a reflection of the teacher.”

When discussing the Chicago Teacher Strike, Matthew asserted that the Chicago situation was so complex and volatile and was not exclusively specific to tenure. He indicated that there was also huge downsizing in the most impoverished areas of the city requiring students in some instances to travel through gang communities to get to their new schools. Describing the Chicago Teacher Strike:

It is such a complex picture that I think there is so much going on there beyond tenure, so it is hard to take tenure out and examine it as an element of a very complex situation. I feel that anyone in any profession who is not effective on the benchmarks that are outlined within the evaluation process should not be in that position. I think that even taking tenure outside of the equation, if the evaluation process is administered consistently and it’s a valid evaluation, then the result of that should validate whether an individual should or should not be in a position.

When considering reevaluation for tenure throughout a teacher’s career, Matthew agreed with the idea that teachers should be reevaluated for tenure at various intervals. He noted, “I agree with reevaluation not only with tenure, but think about the fact that we are required to have our vehicle inspected on a regular basis to make sure that it is safe and operating effectively.” He noted that even within personal relationships with a spouse or friends, there are opportunities to reflect on what is going well, and what is fulfilling and then to consider and improve various aspects to make the relationship more effective. He
suggested that high quality performance, much like high quality relationships is reliant on constant reflection and commitment to improvement. In terms of periodic reevaluation of tenure, he suggested that as long as the intermittent evaluations were coming from a variety of evaluators using a variety of tools, he would grant support for that modification to the existing system.

When sharing his views on the modification of New Jersey tenure law which enacted a loss of tenure status after a teacher has received two ineffective ratings, Matthew suggested, “This could be dangerous.” He noted that in his opinion in order for that type of reform to make sense, the loss of tenure status would have to be based upon teachers’ performance, but also personal and professional issues that may have affected their performance, as well as the populations of students they are working with. When contemplating this reform initiative, Matthew also indicated that, “all of the new Common Core shifts are new and there is a definite learning curve; all of those things need to be taken into consideration before I could support tenure being eliminated for someone who may just need more time to figure out new approaches, or may have difficult students on their caseloads.”

When discussing some private schools functioning without tenure, Matthew asserted that while he is aware that many private schools do not grant tenure, he would argue that it doesn’t mean everything is fully functional in those setting either:

There are some charter schools that were supposed to be the solution for all things that ail public education and we are finding that is simply not the case. I think it is important that in education people have to attain certain levels and achieve specific distinctions to show that they have put the work in to reach a certain level of
professional skill in order to hold the position that they hold, so I would argue that private schools should consider utilizing tenure systems.

Matthew expressed that in both public and private schools there needs to be a system in place to insure ongoing checks and balances for quality and that teacher evaluation in any setting has to be based on multiple measures and more than one evaluator. He also indicated a drawback of the lack of tenure in private schools, stating, “I have to think that the lack of job security which tenure provides may be why many teachers leave private schools to become employed in public schools.”

Matthew indicated that overall he accepts and supports the current tenure practices in K-12 education. He noted that globally it is a fair system, which serves the educational organization well.

**Megan.** When sharing her views on tenure in her school district, Megan noted that a benefit of tenure is that it requires a level of experience and preparedness. She recalled that when she was pursuing tenure status in the district, the Assistant Superintendent at the time taught a set of required tenure preparation classes. Megan noted that each week, the group of teachers who began in the district together would meet and that during their time together they would read and discuss books such as Wong’s, *The First Days of School* and they also watched professional development videos designed to enhance their teaching. Megan enjoyed meeting and discussing practices, views and philosophies. She noted, “I felt like I was growing as a teacher as a result of the process and the classes, and most importantly, I felt prepared.” She explained that as a result of the classes, she knew the expectations for creating a portfolio showcasing her professional work to be presented to the Board of Education for their review when they were considering granting tenure.
She recalled the camaraderie of the group and noted, “It was really nice to have a group of people to meet with weekly who were in the same situation and we worked through it together, collaborated and shared ideas and solutions, which was really helpful.” She explained that the classes and process eliminated some of the worry about understanding and meeting the requirements for tenure. She enjoyed knowing that she could talk to a group of people who she felt like she was “in it together with.” She noted that the group discussions about research on topics such as student retention and types of assessments made her feel well informed and more confident as an educator.

When discussing tenure within the school district, Megan stated, “I’m in a love-hate relationship with tenure.” She considered the positive and negative aspects of tenure:

I love that I am tenured, because I feel safe in that, but it also frustrates me because I don’t want to be classified as being in the league of some of my other colleagues who are tenured. It’s hard, because we are all tenured, but I know that when compared to some of the other tenured teachers here, I worked harder, stay longer and do more, because I care about my students, not because I am tenured. I know that there are other people who don’t work hard at all and some who even put in very little effort, but they are safe because they are tenured.

Megan reflected on a time in her career when she was thankful that she held tenure status. She explained that soon after being granted tenure, one day in class she made a general announcement, stating “I have a paper here without a name on it and I need somebody to claim it.” She explained that when no one claimed the paper, she tore it in half and threw it in the garbage can. She noted that there was no further discussion about the nameless paper and that the class moved on with the lesson. The next day, she received an
email from the principal that she needed to stop in to see him. She recalled being very nervous despite feeling that she didn't do or say anything that she felt was wrong. The principal indicated that the parent of the student whose paper had been torn up had requested a meeting. The principal at the time noted that Megan had made her child hate school and ruined his educational career. In addition to the parent informing the principal of the situation, she also indicated that she was going to the Superintendent of Schools to report this incident. Megan described her concern:

I was in a complete panic. I proactively requested a meeting with the Superintendent to discuss the situation and give him a heads up that the parent would be contacting him. I told him my side of the story and explained that from my perspective it was a non-confrontational situation and that no one had been singled out.

Megan explained that years later as a more experienced teacher, she would have handled the situation differently and probably would not have torn up the student's paper. She noted however, that while she can't say that having tenure played a major role in the situation, her tenure status definitely crossed her mind frequently while that particular situation was evolving and she recalls being glad that she was tenured and felt some security in the fact that ultimately that her job wasn’t in jeopardy.

Megan suggested that tenure makes teachers comfortable, and noted that being too comfortable also goes along with being complacent or unworried about job performance. She explained that sometimes people fall into a rut after being granted tenure, because they lack the incentive to “be on top of their game.” She recalled hearing some of her co-workers discussing tenure:
They say things like ‘Well, what are they going to do? I’m tenured.’ That’s one of the things I hate about tenure, but then again I love the fact that I have that status, so there is a safety net related to that. It is just troublesome for me when a colleague isn’t putting in the same effort that I am.

Megan explained that she goes to school on approximately 30 days during the summer to prepare her classrooms and lessons for her incoming students. She noted that doing so gives her a level of comfort in her preparedness and allows her to be the best teacher that she can be. She explained that not having tenure wouldn’t affect how she performs her job, because from her perspective it is not about tenure status, but rather the children in her classroom.

When considering underperforming tenured teachers, Megan described a teacher who she works with who is not putting in what she considers to be adequate effort:

I get pretty frustrated when I see a colleague on Pinterest or Facebook, or taking a personal phone call every day. I get angry by those who leave early every day for supposed doctor’s appointments, or abuse sick time when I am doing the extreme opposite. I want to do well in my job, it’s really important to me. I shouldn’t make it all about how much time someone puts in, because I know some really amazing teachers, one was even my mentor who is really efficient. They come in, they focus and get the job done in a shorter time than I do, but they are still 100% committed.

When discussing the drawbacks of tenure, Megan discussed the evaluation process in her district and described it as “frustrating.” She noted that she would not be popular with the teachers’ union for saying this, “but I feel like tenure shouldn’t be granted to only be followed by supervisors checking in erratically to see how I am performing and always
announcing in advance when they will visit my classroom. I can do a song and dance any time that I know my supervisor is coming in for an observation.” Megan explained that in order to get a clear picture of a teacher’s work, administrators should be able to walk into any classroom on any day, without giving prior warning. She noted that she personally has a “healthy fear of walk-in observations.” She explained that more unannounced observations would allow supervisors to see what goes on every day, rather than granting tenure to teachers who were able to “put on a good show” when they knew in advance that the Principal or Superintendent would be visiting classrooms to observe teaching.

During the discussion about using student assessment data to evaluate teacher performance, Megan stated that she did not support such measures. She indicated that many factors relate to test scores given the academic diversity of the students being taught. She also contended that she disagrees with teachers being compared to each other based on student test scores, because every class is different. She indicated that it is generally unfair for a state test to be used to determine either granting or maintaining tenure status:

We have seen so many changes to the state tests that we are never even sure how to best prepare kids during any given year. I’m okay with classroom observation by supervisors, portfolios and even parent feedback being used for tenure decisions, but tests scores simply are not a fair measure.

Megan related to the teachers involved in the Chicago Teacher Strike, and noted that she understood their fear of potentially losing their tenure and job security. Despite understanding the perspective of the Chicago teachers, Megan clarified:

If I was speaking to a teacher in Chicago concerned about losing tenure I’d tell them, if you’re not in it for the right reasons, get out and find something else to do; don’t
just stay in education, because you are tenured. I would like to believe there are plenty of amazing teachers in Chicago who didn’t protest and picket about tenure issues, because they were too busy teaching and things like tenure and politics don’t make a difference in terms of how they perform their jobs.

When considering being reevaluated for tenure periodically throughout her career, Megan contended that she would completely support reevaluation of her tenure status at various intervals. She noted that it is more logical to reevaluate periodically, rather than trying to predict a teacher’s long-term performance at the culmination of the first three years in the profession.

Megan also indicated support of the tenure reforms that were put in place in New Jersey. She explained that from her perspective the job would be taken more seriously if teachers were aware that after being classified as ineffective through use of a fair evaluation system, necessary improvements must be made or teachers will risk losing their jobs. Megan discussed opportunities for professional development:

We are offered training after training, and staff day after staff day to help us improve, if people are not making improvements then I think it is fair that they lose their tenure. Having tenure and keeping tenure would be taken a lot more seriously if that was the case.

The lack of tenure status in some private schools led Megan to contend that in those instances, private school administrator must have more authority to get rid of underperforming teachers. Megan noted her strong viewpoints of underperforming teachers:
From my point of view, you go to work because you want to do a good job and you’re self-motivated. I guess overall I am not a proponent of tenure, that’s what this is telling me. I am a proponent of being reevaluated regularly to determine if you stay or if you go. There would be a lot of people in our district doing things a lot differently if they could lose their jobs for not being effective.

Overall, Megan does not support the current tenure practices in K-12 education and rejects the effectiveness of the system as it now exists. She asserted that she globally rejects current tenure practices because she believes it protects poorly performing teachers at the detriment of the students who they are responsible for teaching.

**JoAnn.** JoAnn expressed appreciation for the tenure practices within the district. When she was hired the expectations were very clear to her and she had a good sense of what she should and should not be doing in order to be granted tenure. She was evaluated multiple times throughout those first three probationary years by the Principal and Superintendent. She attended meetings with the administrators prior to and after each of the classroom observations that they completed and she was provided with written comments, which included both compliments and constructive criticisms or areas in need of improvement. She recalled the procedures as being well managed and noted that it was an “excellent process.” She felt very comfortable and confident in her classroom practices as a result of going through the evaluation process affiliated with tenure. She recalled one instance when she felt it necessary to question the accuracy of the way something had been reflected in an observation report and she noted that the supervisor was open to that conversation, despite the fact that she didn’t have tenure at the time.
For JoAnn, being granted tenure gave her a confidence that the school believed in her, and subsequently she felt the need to be a very loyal employee and carry out the mission to the best of her ability. She explained, “It made me feel that the school had faith in me to carry out my duties appropriately."

In terms of academic freedom tenure affords, JoAnn recalled a sense of confidence:

I don’t ever feel like I’ve been censored or would fall in a category where someone would be analyzing my every word. I expect professional behavior from the administrators, and I hope that in return they know that they will get professionalism from me. At a high school level, the issues are not as great, because the curriculum is somewhat restricted in terms of everything we have to teach and fit in that we don’t have many opportunities to go beyond those topics. During my AP biology classes, however, I never hesitate to go into ideas and controversy associated with genetic engineering, abortion, evolution, etc. I’ve never once been questioned about it, and I just tried to be very plain and forthcoming with my students when they asked questions or raised issues.

JoAnn did not express any specific complaints about tenure or the effects that tenure has on teachers, but noted that tenure and seniority are often confused, and tenure should do more to support veteran teachers’ jobs. She explained:

People equate tenure to job security, but I have watched tenured individuals with longevity of 15, 20, 25 years in the district being let go, because the district can no longer afford to fund a particular program. It is tough to see people be let go after such a long time, while a brand new teacher in a different area of teaching is able to
keep his or her job. So even though they have seniority, their tenure isn’t enough to protect them.

JoAnn knows that people are sometimes critical of tenure being a sense of job security, but she really doesn't view tenure as providing her with job security. She reflects on her ability to do a good job every day, and every year with every child. She has spent over 30 years teaching and describes, “Loving every second of it.” Subsequently, she doesn’t think she would be affected if tenure didn’t exist. She understands why some critics of tenure are concerned with tenure status in K-12 education providing job security to bad teachers, and while she realizes that many of her colleagues would be incredibly stressed and feel threatened by the elimination of tenure, she personally would not be concerned or do her job any differently with or without tenure.

JoAnn believes that student achievement data should be included in teacher evaluation, but that it needs to be proportionate:

I think that we need to recognize the limitations and the fact that we have students, who are transient, in school under duress, have medical issues both psychological and physical that limit their attendance and participation. While we attempt to do all we can to make all students successful, I do not believe that every student will be successful. I think that student progress should play a part in tenure evaluations, but I think we need to be careful about what kind of data we use. A score on a state test is not necessarily a reflection of how well a student or teacher is performing.

JoAnn would only want test scores to be one of multiple factors used to evaluate teachers, because she knows a number of teachers who may have produced decent test scores, but were not available to students, did not sponsor student groups, provide
mentorship or lead clubs. JoAnn understands that based on the assessment data they would be considered effective, but she feels that the school was getting the bare minimum out of those teachers from a broader perspective.

JoAnn believes that ineffective teachers in Chicago or anywhere else in the country should not be allowed to continue to teach. Based on her career experience, she compares tenure in higher education to tenure in K-12 education:

"Based on my experience, I think tenure is done much better in higher education, because it is a tiered system with benchmarks and check and balances. That is not the case in K-12. There is no incentive to improve and it is extremely costly to get rid of tenured teachers in K-12. Despite the fact that tenure is managed much more effectively in higher education, I do bristle at the way the news media at times lumps all K-12 teachers with tenure as ineffective slackers. That is simply not accurate."

JoAnn supports the idea of reevaluation of tenure at various intervals throughout a teacher’s career describing the measure as “an absolutely wonderful idea.” She also contends that for each level of tenure teachers should have to demonstrate their participation in the school community, because she feels it is not just about teaching a class, but rather about being involved in the many aspects of the children’s lives. She recommends a tiered tenure system where initial tenure would be granted after three or four years, and then every five years teachers would be required to submit evidence to show that they are current, continuing their education and that they are still performing the job at a high quality level."
JoAnn favors actions being taken after a teacher has two ineffective ratings, as was implemented in New Jersey. She believes that teachers, however, should be given the option after two ineffective rating to participate in professional development and be assigned a mentor, so that they have the tools to improve and possibly reapply for tenure.

JoAnn is aware that in private schools quite often tenure is not granted, but after having worked in both public and private schools she contends that both models have their own issues. From her time working in private schools, she knows of instances when new administrators have wanted to take the school in a very different direction. She recalls that the teachers in those situations had to get on board with the changes, because they did not have tenure protections. JoAnn feels that in that instance, it was actually a disadvantage to the faculty at the private school not to have tenure and it had no relationship with the quality of their work, but rather leadership changes and to some extent politics.

In an overall sense, JoAnn noted that she accepts the current tenure practices in K-12 education. She described the current tenure system as being functional and adequate.

Eileen. Eileen noted that a benefit of tenure is that it provides an incentive and an opportunity for the probationary period to serve as a learning period for new teachers. She feels that new teachers understand that they need to hone their skills and develop their craft in order to be at a level to be granted tenure and keep their jobs:

New teachers understand they can’t just go through the motions of showing up every day, and must really up their games to be considered for tenure. In our district teachers are required to create a tenure portfolio for the Board of Education to review. It makes it seem like less of an arbitrary decision to grant tenure to teachers, because it is actually based on something that they have created to
showcase the quality, depth and breadth of their work. I also think that our mentor program for new teachers is strong and a positive source of support. Overall, I believe that the tenure process in our district creates an opportunity for teachers to put their best foot forward and show what they are capable of.

Eileen believes that some tenured teachers “just don’t care.” She noted that they might have cared and put forth the effort that they needed to within their first three years of their career and even beyond that, but she believes that it is hard to predict how dedicated someone will be 25 or 30 years down the road. Eileen contended that amongst the teaching ranks there is great frustration with tenured teachers not working hard or not really caring:

I don’t think it is specific to our district’s practices, but rather tenure in general. I think that is the reason that people are increasingly critical of tenure. Luckily, most tenured teachers would work just as hard regardless of their tenure status, but a few bad teachers really create a negative view about tenure in the field of K-12 education.

Eileen recalled a colleague whose quality of teaching she felt was really sub-par. She noted that there was very little planning or feedback being given to parents or students and as a result, there was a lot of frustration. The administrators were aware of the situation and Eileen believes that they tried to offer suggestions and support. She explained that despite the hard line administrators took with this teacher, their options were limited, because he was tenured and he knew that there was very little anyone could do to him. The teacher was close to retiring so Eileen feels that everyone made the best of the situation until he left, but she noted that the situation created a lot of hard feelings amongst
parents who were not happy, as well as other teachers who were annoyed that he wasn’t making any effort. Eileen explained that the teachers in the subsequent grade level felt like it was a waste of a school year for some of the children in that class and they were frustrated that they would have to try to fill in the gaps the following school year.

Eileen believes that another drawback of tenure is that it essentially asks someone to predict the future and suggests a system to allow supervisors to evaluate that a tenured teacher has maintained the standard required for tenure over the course of his or her career. She explained, “I think it is asking a lot of our administrators to try to predict the future and determine if someone will remain a high quality educator for the duration of his or her career.”

Eileen is not opposed to having student test scores included in teacher evaluation. She feels that as long as the evaluation has multiple components including teacher evaluation and professional contributions, and doesn’t just relate to student test scores, than it is logical to link student achievement to teacher evaluation:

Test scores should be a part of the teacher evaluation and one component of determining effectiveness, but they can’t be the only component and shouldn’t even be the primary component, because there are lots of factors involved and many other aspects of teaching. I think that a teacher evaluation system which links teacher evaluation to test scores will help give supervisors a little more authority.

Eileen followed the Chicago teacher strike closely, and sides with the administrators, because “on the whole the buck stops with them.” She noted that the school administrators get blamed for failing schools, despite having limited power when dealing with poorly performing tenured teachers. Eileen contended that:
Good teachers who are effective won’t argue about tenure reform happening, because they get tired of their colleagues who are slacking. In any other profession, if you don’t do your job well then you are replaced by someone who will.

Eileen believes that reevaluation of a teacher’s tenure status periodically throughout a teacher’s career would make more sense than having it be a one-time decision. She believes that there needs to be more authority given to principals, so that when they indicate that a tenured teacher needs to make improvements, the teacher actually has to take corrective actions.

Eileen also believes that tenure could be eliminated in K-12 education:

I probably wouldn’t be thrilled initially about losing my tenure protections, but it makes sense for the system as a whole. Teacher quality should determine if someone continues to teach.

Eileen feels that multiple ineffective evaluation rating leading to elimination of tenure, similar to the tenure reform enacted in New Jersey, will become a more widespread trend in education. She believes that the profession is more data driven and transparent than ever:

I think schools will have a hard time dealing with the public outcry that will occur if ineffective teachers remain in their jobs. I’m not sure it could be an all or nothing proposition though. There are always exceptions like a teacher who has a couple challenging classes or has been critically ill, and those things should at least be considered.

Eileen does not equate the fact that tenure isn’t utilized at some private school as meaning that the teachers at private schools are necessarily all effective or end up being
terminated. She noted that, “a lot of private schools don’t pay very well and there is a bit of a mentality that you get what you pay for, so I’m not sure that this argument makes a strong case for tenure one way or the other.”

From a global standpoint, Eileen rejects and does not support current K-12 tenure practices. She noted that some teachers would do things a lot differently, if they feared losing their jobs as a result of poor or ineffective professional performance.

**Michael.** Michael views a benefit of tenure in K-12 education to be that it provides credibility and distinction to individuals in a profession, which is often undervalued by the public. He feels that tenure serves as an indicator or status symbol of quality in the field of education:

> It’s a badge of distinction, and also gives a sense of confidence that a teacher is performing at the level expected in the school. I think the tenure reception that our Board of Education holds for newly tenured teachers is really nice. It’s great to see that they value the distinction of tenure enough to have a small ceremony and invite the tenure candidates’ families in to share the milestone at a reception. It just makes it feel like more of a significant achievement in that sense; like they take their authority to grant tenure seriously and want to celebrate the milestone with those who have earned it.

Michael noted that another benefit of tenure is that a teacher has job security when new administrators come to work for the district. He explained, “It is always a little scary to have a new supervisor and wonder if they will like you and your job performance, but at least with tenure a teacher’s job is protected.” Given that school administrators change frequently, Michael feels that tenure helps to mitigate the uncertainty that comes with
having a new boss who might have a different approach, or different way of thinking than a previous principal may have had.

Michel believes that one of the unfortunate aspects of living and working in a small town is that sometimes people get unfair reputations that aren't necessarily based in credible facts:

One of my colleagues had sort of a bad rap, which I thought was unfair. It wasn’t based on how good of a teacher he was, but rather on the fact that he had gone through a very ugly divorce and there was a lot of gossip about the whole situation. All in all, he was a good teacher, but some parents requested that their kids not be in his class and even some of the other teachers were pretty nasty to him. I remember being glad at the time that he had tenure, because he seemed to be the target of a lot of unfair and unsubstantiated criticisms and tenure protected his job.

Michael reported arriving at school every day and doing the best job he is capable of. He feels that if students make progress toward their goals, then he is being effective. He indicated that his professional behavior wouldn’t be any different if he didn’t have tenure. With that said, he noted that he is glad that tenure protects him from some of the controversial aspects of his job, but not having tenure wouldn’t mean that he wasn’t as dedicated or committed to his work. Michael noted that he does know some of his fellow teachers wouldn’t be happy if they didn’t have the security of tenure, and that they would have to “work a lot harder, but that’s not necessarily such a bad thing.”

Michael appreciated that tenure protects teachers from the controversy or politics that can come with certain teaching assignments. He noted that working in the Special Education classroom can be particularly controversial, at times, because parents are often
pushing for a new approach or different program. Michael noted that tenure allows him to have more confidence when he is defending his decision for a student to have, or not have certain modifications or programs. He explained that word ‘discrimination’ is thrown around a lot in the world of special education, and that he has always appreciated knowing that the district respected him enough as an educator to grant him tenure, which he views as a show of support for his professional judgment.

When reflecting on the quality of his work, Michael asserted:

I work really hard. I never leave school without some type of homework, whether it is having papers to grade or lessons to plan. There is just always more to get done than what the school day allows for. It means a lot to me that I am prepared for my students with well-developed lessons, and that I am actually taking time to grade their work and provide them with feedback.

Compared to his dedication and the extra time he puts into his profession, Michael believes that a drawback of tenure is that he is aware of few tenured teachers that put in very little effort:

They show movies or assign independent work, rather than teaching and I can assure you they are not bringing anything home or putting in any more time than they absolutely have to. It is really frustrating to know that we earn the same paycheck despite the huge discrepancy in the amount of work we are putting forth. I also know first-hand that the principal has tried to require some of those teachers to make improvements or put in more effort, but they know that they are tenured and that the principal doesn’t have a whole lot of power to do much other than write them up.
Michael views tenure reform as inevitable and views tenure in K-12 education as the “Achilles’ heel of the Teachers’ Union.” He expressed frustration with working really hard, only to have the teacher next door putting in half the effort, and possibly even making more money if they have accrued more seniority within the district. Michael contended that politicians should consider finding a way to evaluate and monitor the quality of every teacher throughout their entire career, rather than just their first three years. He noted that teachers tend to be really motivated and excited in their first three years of teaching, but explained that unfortunately for some teachers that level of professional engagement changes and can be detrimental to students.

Michael believes that student standardized test scores should be a factor in teacher evaluation, however he noted that performance on tests cannot be the only consideration given that there are so many potential variables that contribute. He explained that the benefits of using test scores are that they are less subjective and more independent measures than something like a classroom observation conducted by a school administrator. He feels that in some cases that administrator’s relationship with the teacher could influence the outcomes, unlike a score on a standardized test which he views as less subjective. He noted that a drawback of using assessment data is that depending on the time of day, the weather and the effort a student puts forth, the test scores could be affected, so there are many potential factors that could come into play, and consequently the assessment may not be a true reflection of the teacher, or of what a student knows and understands.

Michael recalled watching the news footage of the Chicago teachers’ strike, and stated, “I couldn't help but think that regardless of their views, they needed to get back in
the classroom and stop letting a political debate negatively impact kids.” He asserted that
tenure definitely protects poor teachers in Chicago and elsewhere in K-12 education. He
noted that he believes that the school leadership still needs to make every effort to try to
improve the work of poor teachers, but recognized that sometimes those ineffective
teachers don’t have much incentive to improve, because even if they don’t they will still
have their job as a result of having been granted tenure.

Michael feels that an interval type reevaluation of tenure at various points
throughout a teacher’s career is an approach that would be welcomed in the field of
education. He noted that there are many hard working teachers in the field who would
welcome the opportunity to showcase their skills at various points during their careers,
rather than just once very early on in their professional lives.

Michael attributed that at least part of the controversy in New Jersey with teachers
losing tenure after two ineffective ratings, may have related more to the politics and the
politicians who were involved, rather than the idea of removing ineffective teachers. He
believes the public supports the idea of removing ineffective teachers:

I don’t think many people, me included, are able to support or provide justification
for bad teachers who are negatively impacting kids. The damage is so significant, so
pervasive and so potentially detrimental to a child even long into adult life. I am
hopeful that even the leadership of the teachers’ unions want to insure that high
quality teachers are teaching kids and that poor, ineffective teachers are removed
from the classroom.

Michael noted that both public and private systems have flaws when it comes to
teacher quality. He does not feel that tenure or lack of tenure is the primary reason in
either case. He indicated that he knows of excellent, as well as ineffective educators in both public and private school settings. He does believe, however, that private school administrators have greater authority and autonomy when it comes to teacher quality and enforcing suggestions for professional improvements than their counterparts in public school administration position have.

From an overall standpoint, Michael rejects and does not support the current tenure practices utilized in K-12 education. He justified his rejection by stating that the current system protects underperforming teachers who are detrimental to children.

**Data Collection Conclusion**

The opinions, viewpoints and experiences of the five teachers participating in this study regarding tenure practices in K-12 education were outlined in this chapter. Teachers participating in the study shared their candid attitudes and ideas regarding their first-hand experiences with tenure, as well as their opinions of tenure reform initiatives on a national scope. Participants were given multiple opportunities to elaborate and expand upon their viewpoints, and also to clarify their statements to insure the highest level of accuracy and fidelity to their options is reflected. Salient points and main ideas have been detailed within this section, as well as direct quotations from the participants. A detailed analysis of the responses of the participants, as well as the common and unique themes that were identified are included within the subsequent chapter.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary

Through analyzing and coding the responses of the participants in this study, common themes as well as unique, outlying viewpoints and opinions emerged, regarding tenure practices in K-12 education from the perspective of tenured teachers.

The questions. This project originated with the question, "What are tenured teachers’ perceptions of tenure in K-12 education?" Three variables exist within the research question: the teacher, K-12 tenure practices locally and K-12 tenure practices globally. Throughout the investigation, the concentration was consistently on the voice of the teacher and two distinct constructs emerged involving acceptance and rejection related to topics involving K-12 tenure. Participants’ judgments were based on their direct, first-hand experiences with tenure practices within their schools, as well as their global opinions regarding national tenure issues, despite their lack of direct, first-hand involvement with the national situations or scenarios.

The investigation allowed the researcher to examine three distinct facets related to teachers and K-12 tenure practices. First, “What aspects do tenured educators accept and view as the benefits of current K-12 tenure practices?” Within this question, teachers shared their positive direct, personal experiences with tenure practices within K-12 education. Next, the study investigates, “What aspects do tenured educators reject and view as the drawbacks of current tenure practices?” Within this question, teachers shared their negative personal experiences, or concerns that they have identified with tenure practices within K-12 education based on their first-hand involvement as teachers. Lastly, the study explores, “What are tenured educators’ opinions, aspects of acceptance and
notable rejections regarding tenure reform agendas and the prevalent criticisms of tenure in K-12 education?” This question sought to determine the participants’ views and opinions related to tenure reform initiatives and specific events related to tenure reform that have occurred nation-wide.

**Reframing the significance.** Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005) asserted that teacher quality (measured by estimated teacher impacts on student test score achievement) is the most significant educational influence in terms of improving student achievement. Weisberg (2009) contended that a notably insignificant percentage of tenured teachers in K-12 education are ever dismissed for underperformance. The imbalance is significant given that the percentage of tenured teachers being terminated is not commensurate or proportionate with the dismissal rates in the majority of professional fields, and of further significance given that the variance in achievement for students can exceed the equivalent of one grade-level in annual academic growth based on educator quality (Hanushek, 2009).

Johnson (2013) alluded to the significance when she indicated that, “A world-class education system lies at the heart of the American dream (p. 17).” Johnson (2013) further contended that a focus and emphasis being placed on teacher effectiveness is long overdue. Public Agenda research has recurrently exposed that preponderances of teachers, of all ages and levels of experience view K-12 tenure policies as unreasonable, unrealistic, or poorly executed (Public Agenda & American Institutes for Research [AIR], 2009).

Teacher tenure in K-12 education is a significant issue, which has implications for student achievement and teachers have informed opinions and viewpoints on the matter.
given their first-hand experiences and familiarities of common tenure practices in education.

**The constructs.** This study was framed by two distinct constructs in alignment with Social Judgment Theory which were used to categorize the data: acceptance and rejection. Social Judgment Theory affirms that when individuals encounter a situation or topic they make judgments either along a continuum ranging from acceptable to unacceptable, or holds no significant opinion. (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). Favorable views or in the case of this study, benefits of tenure fall within the latitude of acceptance, unfavorable views or drawbacks of tenure fall within the latitude of rejection.

**The focus of the analysis.** As the thoughts, opinions and perceptions of the teachers participating in this study were analyzed, the primary focus was on capturing and identifying the tenured teachers’ perceptions of tenure practices within K-12 education, thus inserting the teacher’s voice into the dialogue about teacher tenure. The study findings conveyed positive and negative views regarding the tenure practices that the participants had experienced within the school district, and similarly the findings displayed both positive and negative perspectives relating to the national tenure reform aspect of the study.

Throughout the study, and more specifically via the data analysis the researcher sought to identify common themes, as well as outliers or contrasts related to the participants views on the benefits and drawbacks of the tenure practices within their school district. Furthermore, the researcher aimed to ascertain common themes, as well as outliers or contrasts related to the participants’ opinions regarding national tenure reform.
agendas. Additionally, the researcher determined consistencies and discrepancies between each participant’s views about local tenure issues and national tenure issues.

**Answering the central question.** Each of the five participant’s responses to the questions asked amongst the series of three interviews was analyzed. The analysis allowed the researcher to determine areas of acceptance or benefits, as well as areas of rejection or drawbacks related to K-12 tenure practices. The outcomes of the analysis of the participants’ responses allowed the researcher to address the research questions and fulfill the main objective of the study by determining the tenured teachers’ perceptions of tenure in K-12 education and sharing their voices.

**Theoretical Framework**

Within this study, the identified benefits of tenure practices by the participants were classified as aspects of acceptance, and the described drawbacks were characterized as areas of rejection of current tenure practices in alignment with Social Judgment Theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). Additionally, the participants overarching acceptance or rejection of K-12 tenure practices were classified as their anchor positions (Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

In relation to the first principle of Social Judgment Theory; which contends that when individuals encounter a scenario they make judgments ranging from acceptable to unacceptable, all participants offered their views related to their acceptance or rejection of the tenure practices and scenarios that were discussed within the interviews (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). In alignment with the second principle of Social Judgment Theory, participants favorable views related to K-12 Teacher Tenure were classified within the latitude of acceptance, and unfavorable views fell within the latitude of rejection (Sherif &
Sherif 1967). According to the third principle of Social Judgment Theory the level of direct personal involvement teacher participants in this study have with tenure practices influenced their acceptance, non-commitment, or rejection of issues and opinions related to tenure within their school district and possibly on a broader, national scope, as well (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). To that end, the participants in this study all had direct experience and with tenure practices, which influenced their opinions regarding tenure, as opposed to individuals outside of the profession of education who lack the personal involvement with tenure practices in K-12 education. According to the fourth principle of Social Judgment Theory, individuals alter or distort incoming information to fit their existing categories of judgment and their anchor point; however the researcher was unclear about participants overarching anchor positions solely based on their responses within the first two interviews, and consequently, participants’ anchor positions were explicitly clarified within the third interview (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). The fifth principle of the theory investigates the conditions under which an individual may be willing to go outside of his or her preferred anchor position (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). The data analysis of the participants’ responses, which is detailed within Chapter 5, indicates multiple instances of support for tenure reform agendas, despite participants indicating an overarching anchor position of acceptance of current tenure practices within K-12 education.

Social Judgment Theory was well a well suited theoretical framework for the purposes of this study, as it provided the researcher with a lens for investigating and analyzing the participants’ acceptance, rejection, non-commitment and preferred anchor positions regarding teacher tenure in K-12 education.
Benefits

Acceptance. The five participants all identified aspects of the current tenure practices in their district that they accept and view as benefits. Participants’ responses were analyzed in order to answer the first sub question, which is, “What aspects do tenured educators accept and view as the benefits of current tenure practices?” General themes, as well as the commonality of specific responses being cited by participants is reflected in Table 2 and elaborated on in narrative detail within this chapter.
Table 2
Benefits of Current Tenure Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Benefit</th>
<th>Number of Participants Cited</th>
<th>Specifics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development (During Probationary Period - First 3 Years)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mentor Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tenure Support Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Portfolio Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Freedom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Protection when covering difficult/controversial topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Protection when a parent complains about how something was handled by a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Security</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feeling safe about continued employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Protection if gossip or unsubstantiated criticism occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Evaluation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tenure process requires administrative observation/evaluation/feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinction/Merit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Viewed as a milestone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Benefits</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Five teachers: commonly cited benefits.** All five study participants identified benefits that they have experienced with the current tenure practices within their school district. Commonalities emerged when comparing the responses of the participants as they related to the perceived benefits of tenure.

The most commonly cited benefit of tenure practices within the school district, was that structured professional development was a component of a new teacher’s probationary period during their first three years with the school district. Participants who cited professional development as a benefit of the K-12 tenure practices within this school district, noted specific aspects of the program as beneficial, including the mentor program for new teachers, the required tenure classes and the portfolio development requirement.

Participants explained that the mentor program paired a tenured, veteran teacher with a non-tenured teacher who was new to the school district. One participant noted, “I had a mentor who was a great source of support and I really felt that I could talk to her when I was having an issue with a student or parent, when I needed instructional suggestions or just when I was having a bad day and needed a pep talk.” Another participant suggested that the district often paired mentors and mentees based on common grade levels or the fact that they teach similar content areas to make the relationship an even more meaningful and relevant source of support.

When referencing the required tenure classes as an aspect of the professional development, which was a commonly cited benefit to the current tenure practices, participants described the program as being a meaningful and helpful source of professional development. Additionally, the camaraderie of participating in the classes
with a cohort of teachers who all started working for the district at approximately the same
time was mentioned by multiple participants as a benefit of the district’s tenure practices.

The tenure portfolio was cited in multiple instances as a positive aspect of the
professional development practices related to the tenure practices within the participants’
school district. Participants noted value in the Board of Education reviewing the
comprehensive portfolios as a basis for making their decisions related to granting tenure.
Participants discussed appreciating that the Board of Education took an opportunity to
view a portfolio which showcased their work, rather than making arbitrary decision about
granting tenure with little or no information about the teacher they were considering.

Job security was another commonly cited benefit of the tenure practices within the
school district and was referenced by three of the five participants during the interviews.
One participant recalled a situation a colleague had endured, and noted, “I remember being
glad at the time that he had tenure, because he seemed to be the target of a lot of unfair and
unsubstantiated criticisms and tenure protected his job.” When referencing job security,
another participant stated, “I love that I am tenured because I feel safe in that, but it also
frustrated me because I don’t want to be classified as being in the league of some of my
other colleagues who are tenured.”

The last recurrent theme noted as a positive benefit of tenure practices within the K-
12 school district was academic freedom; however, only two study participants cited this
benefit making it the least common benefit noted within the study. When referencing
academic freedom as a benefit of K-12 tenure practices, the teachers cited that tenure
ensured they were not censored, or required to avoid discussing certain controversial
topics with their students. Both participants who cited academic freedom as a benefit of
tenure noted that being granted tenure gave them confidence that the Board of Education and the school district felt that they would exercise responsibility and use good judgment as it relates to the authority affiliated with academic freedom.

During the multiple interviews several benefits of tenure practices with the K-12 school district were cited by the participants. While many benefits emerged and were referenced throughout the series of interviews, the common benefits of tenure practices, which were referenced by multiple participants, included the professional development provided to new teachers in preparation for tenure, the job security aligned to tenure and the academic freedom teachers feel as a result of tenure when addressing controversial topics.

**Five teachers: outlying benefits.** While all five participants identified benefits to tenure practices within their school district, two particular benefits of tenure practices were less typical and only noted by one participant each, and are therefore characterized as outlying responses. Specifically, Teacher Evaluation and Distinction/Merit were tenure benefits that were the least commonly identified within this study by comparison to the more commonly recurrent tenure benefits detailed previously.

The teacher evaluation process was identified as a benefit of the tenure practices in this K-12 setting by one participant. That participant described the teacher evaluation protocols and classroom observations utilized during the probationary term associated with tenure considerations as rigorous and meaningful. The teacher explained, “I was evaluated multiple times throughout those [probationary] years by my Principal and Superintendent, which I thought was an excellent process and as a result, I felt very comfortable and confident in my classroom practices.”
The second outlying benefit of K-12 tenure practices is that tenure provides merit and distinction to teachers who are granted tenure status within a school district. This benefit was cited by one participant in the study. When discussing his appreciation of the distinction and merit that tenure status provides teachers, the participant suggested, “The number one positive aspect of tenure is that it provides recognition that I am a high quality teacher who has met the district’s expectations of employment and that I had achieved that at a level worthy of recognition.”

**Conclusion.** In congruence with Social Judgment Theory, participants acknowledged current practices related to tenure within the school district, that they accept and view as beneficial. All participants in the study indicated various aspects of the practices and protocols related to tenure that they view as positive and feel offer some benefit to themselves or others, including those participants who identified general concerns with K-12 tenure practices and had anchor positions that were negative as it related to tenure. Participants anchor positions were identified and are discussed within this chapter. All participants in the study highlighted more than one benefit of K-12 tenure practices within the school district they work in. The preponderance of respondents contended that the support affiliated with mentor programs, professional development and portfolio development are a primary benefit related to the current tenure practices in this district.

**Drawbacks**

**Rejection.** Four out of the five participants identified aspects of the current K-12 tenure practices within their district that they reject and view as drawbacks of the current tenure process. Responses related to drawbacks of current tenure practices served to
answer the second sub question of the study, which is “What aspects do tenured educators reject and view as the drawbacks of current tenure practices?” General themes, as well as the commonality of specific responses being cited by participants are reflected in Table 3 and expounded in narrative detail within this chapter.
### Table 3
*Drawbacks of Current Tenure Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Drawbacks</th>
<th>Number of Participants Cited</th>
<th>Specifics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complacency</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>People Get Too Comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underperformance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not working hard with no fear of losing the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure Preparation/Support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Some of the support, classes, etc. have been eliminated due to budget cuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five teachers: commonly cited drawbacks. Three study participants identified drawbacks of the tenure practices, which they experienced within their school district. Common themes arose when comparing the responses associated with the negative aspects or drawbacks of current K-12 tenure practices.

Two related drawbacks were most commonly cited during the interviews: educator complacency and underperforming teachers. Both educator complacency and teacher underperformance were identified as drawbacks of K-12 tenure practices by three of the five participants in the study.

When discussing educator complacency participants cited that tenure contributes to teachers getting too comfortable within their position. Participants explained that complacency was a detrimental aspect of the current K-12 tenure practices that they had witnessed first-hand within their school district. The teachers explained that as a result of tenure some teachers see little incentive to try new instructional methods, improve their approaches or utilize new and more current resources. When describing the complacency a participant suggested that tenure “allows the status quo to be good enough with no incentive to improve.”

The other drawback of tenure identified by the majority of participants was underperforming teachers. Participants explained that they have observed instances in which the job security experienced by tenured teachers results in poor performance, poor attendance and tardiness, ignoring district initiatives, unresponsiveness to parents and even showing numerous videos in class, rather than providing instruction to students. In the discussion involving underperforming teachers participants noted that some teachers were not performing at the district’s expected level of quality, yet they have no fear of
losing their jobs. When discussing the danger of underperforming teachers, one participant noted that she has colleagues who pick and choose which district initiatives they will comply with, because they feel the leadership team has little authority over tenured teachers. Additionally, all of the participants who identified underperforming teachers as a drawback of tenure cited frustration about the level of effort and quality of work they maintained when they observed colleagues who were not contributing at the same level and in some instances were detrimental to students’ academic progress and achievement. When discussing underperformance as a detriment of tenure, another participant suggested as it relates to teacher performance, “There needs to be a system in place to insure ongoing checks and balances.”

Two study participants did not identify any drawbacks with the current K-12 tenure practices that they have experienced within the school district. Despite not having concerns about tenure practices, both of the participants noted a need for improved evaluation practices and more diligent administrative actions to insure that the best teachers are being granted tenure.

**Five teachers: outlying drawbacks.** Analyses of the responses of the five participants brought one outlying response related to drawbacks of tenure practices to the forefront. The outlying response described a change in the tenure processes within the school district as a result of budgetary constraints and noted that it was a drawback of the current tenure practices within the school district. JoAnn identified that fiscal circumstances had resulted in modifications to the tenure preparation classes, which had been previously required. She noted that the number of sessions and topics covered were greatly reduced. She indicated that, “while aspects of the tenure program still exist it is
nowhere near as good as it was before the budget cuts.” JoAnn concluded that as a result of the programmatic cuts there is more potential for poor teachers to slip through the cracks and be granted tenure.

**Conclusion.** In summation, two predominant and related themes emerged highlighting aspects of the current tenure practices within the school district that participants reject or view as drawbacks, which are educator complacency and underperforming teachers. These recurrent concerns related to K-12 tenure practices within the school district that were identified by the majority of the participants within the study. The sole outlying response related to drawbacks of the tenure practices within the school district focused on the impact of recent budgetary cuts on the district’s tenure preparation professional development program.

**National Tenure Reform**

The five participants in the study responded to a series of scenarios involving national tenure reform initiatives, and shared their thoughts and views on situations related to tenure in K-12 education, which have occurred outside of their current school district. Participants’ responses were analyzed in order to answer the third and final sub question, which is, “What are tenured educators’ opinions, acceptance and rejections regarding tenure reform agendas and the prevalent criticisms of tenure in K-12 education?” General themes, as well as recurrent responses that were cited by participants are reflected and elaborated on in narrative detail within this chapter.

**Tenure based on student achievement.** The researcher explained to the participants that in a 2011 survey conducted by Harvard University’s Program on Educational Policy and Governance (PEPG), 55 percent of respondents’ favored awarding
tenure on the basis of student progress on state tests; 20 percent opposed it (the rest neither favored nor opposed). Participants were asked to respond to the idea of tenure status being linked to student achievement on standardized assessments.

Four out of the five participants in the study felt that a portion of teacher evaluation and tenure decisions should be based on student achievement of assessments. One participant opposed the idea of utilizing student performance data as a factor in making decisions related to tenure of K-12 educators. Two common themes emerged amongst the four participants who favored linking tenure decisions to student achievement.

The first common theme amongst the majority of the study participants was that student achievement data should not be the sole determining factor utilized for tenure decisions, but rather only a portion of teacher evaluation program based on multiple measures. Participants noted that while assessment data should be included within the teacher evaluation process it needs to be proportionate to other evaluative components. To that end, Michael stated, “As long as evaluation has multiple components such as classroom observations, accounting for professional contributions, etcetera and doesn’t just relate to student test scores, than I think it makes sense to link tenure to evaluation.”

Furthermore, the second common theme cited by four participants suggested the need for the demographics of the student populations being tested to be a consideration when using assessment data in a teacher evaluation program or for making tenure decisions. Participants noted that factors such as transient students, oppositional students, medical factors, attendance and participation and special education needs must be considered when utilizing assessment data for teacher evaluation purposes. Multiple participants suggested that when using assessment data for evaluative purposes overall
growth needs to be considered by comparing students’ baseline data at the start of the school year to assessment data collected at the end of the school year.

**Tenure and the Chicago teacher strike.** The researcher framed the next discussion related to tenure practices in K-12 education, by noting that changes in tenure protocols was cited as one of the reasons the teachers in Chicago chose to go on strike in 2012. Furthermore, participants were informed that school leaders and administrators contended that the current tenure practices protect ineffective teachers and prevent them from ensuring that the best educators are teaching in their schools. Participants were asked to share their thoughts and opinions related to the Chicago teacher strike, and specifically if they agree or disagree with the Chicago administrators’ claim that tenure practices potentially protect ineffective teachers.

All five participants unanimously responded that they agree with the administrators’ claims that current K-12 tenure practices in place in Chicago could potentially protect ineffective teachers by providing unwarranted job security. The participants cited that the tenure processes limit the administrator authority and effectiveness as a supervisor when ultimately they are charged with improving failing schools. One participant who supported the Chicago administrators’ perspective was careful to point out that not all teachers in Chicago can be portrayed as ineffective teachers and noted that the media coverage focused on the most extreme, not the most common scenarios.

**Reevaluation of tenure periodically.** The next scenario which participants were asked to consider involved a Gates Study. Specifically, participants were informed that 80% of teachers participating in a Gates study (2012) stated that tenure should be
reevaluated at various intervals in a teacher’s career. Participants were asked to share their opinions about the notion of a teacher’s tenure status being reevaluated and reconsidered at regular intervals, such as every three, five or ten years.

All five participants were in favor of the idea of reevaluating tenure status at various stages in a teacher’s career. None of the study participants expressed any concerns, rejection or negative viewpoints regarding periodic reevaluation. Participants unanimously viewed a tenure reevaluation process as a viable tenure reform initiative, and described such a program as logical and appealing to teachers and administrators alike.

**New Jersey tenure law.** New Jersey’s tenure law was over 100 years old, and classified as the oldest tenure law for K-12 education in the country (O’Neil, 2012). The researcher explained to participants that in New Jersey the tenure law has been modified so that teachers who get two years of partially effective or ineffective ratings lose their tenure status (Christie, 2012, Brookings Institution speech). Participants were asked to share their opinions of the tenure reform in New Jersey.

All five participants supported the idea that teachers who get two years of partially effective or ineffective ratings would lose their tenure status. Participants offered support for the measure noting that schools are becoming increasingly data driven and transparent leading to less subjective teacher effectiveness rating. Participants noted a measure such as the New Jersey reform initiative would insure that tenure would be taken more seriously both initially and throughout one’s career.

While all five participants offered acceptance and support for the idea of teachers who had multiple ineffective ratings losing their tenure status, two participants shared concerns with one aspect of the New Jersey tenure situation. The two participants noted
that while they supported the idea of ineffective teachers losing tenure status, it is important to consider extenuating circumstances or extreme personal crisis.

**Private school practices.** Study participants were asked to share their views of the argument that tenure is not granted in most private schools, and therefore it is not needed in the profession of K-12 education. Participants were asked to respond to proponents of eliminating tenure, noting that tenure status is not granted in private schools to operate effectively and thus, is not necessary in public school settings either.

Four participants rejected this argument against tenure and all four suggested that teacher quality in private schools could be questioned similarly to teacher quality in public school, and therefore tenure practices hold little bearing. Participants noted that both public and private school systems have flaws related to teacher quality, which may or may not directly relate to whether or not tenure is utilized.

One study participant response deviated from the majority in that the participant accepted the argument related to lack of tenure in private schools as a compelling rationale against current tenure practices in K-12 public education. The participant commended private schools for handling issues with teacher quality correctly and noted that some families select private schools exclusively as a result of the high quality teachers on the faculty.

**Conclusion of national tenure reform.** When considering the participants’ responses to the national tenure reform issues presented within the study, it is notable that the majority of the participants offered support for four out of the five scenarios related to tenure reform.
Participants consistently offered the least acceptance and the greatest rejection of eliminating tenure in public schools given that private schools are operational without it in many instances. Participants’ rejection was based on the idea that private schools also employ ineffective teachers.

All study participants unanimously supported the administrators’ view from the Chicago teacher strike that tenure protects ineffective teachers, the notion of reevaluating teachers’ tenure status at regular intervals as suggested in the Gates’ Study and the New Jersey tenure reform that results in loss of tenure status after two ineffective ratings.

**National versus Local Tenure Viewpoints: Consistencies and Discrepancies**

Social Judgment Theory maintains that the level of personal involvement or experience an individual has with an issue affects the individual’s acceptance, non-commitment, or rejection of the issue or opinion even beyond his or her personal scope of experience (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). To that end, according to Social Judgment Theory a participant’s acceptance, non-commitment, or rejection of issues and opinions related to tenure within his or her school district should be indicative of notably consistent views when considering participants assessments of K-12 tenure issues on a broader, national scope, as well. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data and identified both consistencies and discrepancies between views of tenure issues locally and nationally.

**Consistencies.** Two consistent themes arose throughout the course of the study between participants’ viewpoints regarding K-12 tenure practices both locally, within their school district as well as their viewpoints related to K-12 tenure practices more globally on a broader national scope. Regardless of whether the discussion was related to tenure locally or nationally, the following consistent themes emerged.
The first consistent overarching theme that was mirrored in discussion about K-12 tenure practices within the school district, as well as K-12 tenure practices on a broader, national scope is that tenure practices potentially protect ineffective teachers. All five participants cited this concern with tenure practices in response to multiple questions over the series of the interviews. A closely related consistency that was expressed both in terms of colleagues within the school district, as well as national tenure reform is that ineffective teachers should not be guaranteed jobs simply because they have been granted tenure status.

A second consistent theme which was recurring during the discussion about local and national tenure practices was that multiple evaluators should be involved when considering teacher performance as it relates to granting tenure in K-12 education. Participants noted that the involvement of more than one school administrator in the process of teacher evaluation can help to insure that teachers are not being targeted or unfairly evaluated based on the opinion of one evaluator.

In general, regardless if participants were considering the practices related to tenure within their own school district or other school districts nationally, they agree that tenure decisions should be made by multiple evaluators and that tenure status has the potential to protect underperforming teachers.

**Discrepancies.** One discrepancy emerged between the discussions related to tenure practices locally versus nationally. Despite the fact that all five teachers who were interviewed for the study stated that the level of professional development and support through mentor programs and tenure preparation classes was a benefit of tenure in their school district, not a single participant referenced professional development or support in
terms of a benefit of tenure nationally. A possible rationale for professional development not being mentioned as a global benefit of tenure is that the district’s practices exceed expectations and are atypical. One participant noted that the level of professional development and support during the probationary period within his school district as being [of] “exceptionally high quality and certainly not the norm, but one of the elements that makes our tenure program successful.”

**Anchor Positions**

Social Judgment Theory upholds that individuals may have a range of non-mutually exclusive opinions regarding a particular subject, but that they will have an anchor position when considering the subject holistically (O’Keefe, 1990). Given the wide range of non-mutually exclusive opinions shared by study participants regarding tenure in K-12 education, the researcher was unable to conclusively ascertain individual participant’s anchor positions exclusively during the first two interviews given the broad scope of the data collected, as well as participants’ acceptance of some K-12 tenure practices while rejecting other practices related to tenure. To insure that the study accurately reflected the overarching viewpoints of the participants regarding tenure practices in K-12 education, the researcher sought clarity regarding anchor positions within the third interview. Specifically, participants were asked to identify if they widely reject or accept current tenure practices in K-12 education from an overall global perspective, regardless of their views on specific aspects or individual issues. Furthermore, once each participant identified their overarching anchor position regarding K-12 tenure practices, they were given the option of providing a qualifying statement regarding their anchor position. The
anchor positions of each participant, as well as the qualifying statements are displayed on Table 3 (below) and discussed in further detail within this chapter.
### Table 4
*Anchor Positions Regarding Tenure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Identified Overarching Anchor Position Toward K-12 Tenure Practices</th>
<th>Qualifying Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>It is a fair system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Tenure protects poorly performing teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoAnn</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>The current system is functional and adequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Teachers would do things a lot differently if they could lose their jobs for not being effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Tenure protects underperforming teachers who are detrimental to children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As displayed on Table 3, two participants indicated overall acceptance of the current tenure system in K-12 education. Participants indicating acceptance described the current tenure system as fair, adequate and functional. The majority of participants indicated that overall they reject current tenure practices in K-12 education. Participants rejecting the current system conclusively identified underperformance of teachers as the primary reason that they reject the current tenure practices in K-12 education.

Interestingly, despite the indication of Sherif & Hovland (1961) within Social Judgment Theory for the potential for groupthink, particularly as it relates to anchor positions, groupthink was not conclusively represented by the participants in this study. Given that all study participants are tenured teachers in the same school district, the researcher examined individual anchor positions to determine if groupthink was evident by either a unanimous alignment in anchor positions, or a vast majority of participants widely rejecting or accepting current tenure practices in K-12 education. With three participants indicating anchor positions of rejection of current tenure practices and two participants with anchor positions of acceptance of tenure practices, groupthink is not represented for the participant group. The researcher is cognizant that the small sample size of participants is a factor, and given a larger participant group it is possible that anchor positions could more conclusively favor either acceptance or rejection.

**Implications for Practice**

Based on extensive analysis of the participants’ responses to the series of questions asked over the course of three interviews, as well as common themes, discrepancies and suggestions for reform, the following implications for practice emerged when considering tenure practices in K-12 education. The Implications for Practice compiled within this
study are representative of the teachers’ voice in the tenure debate, which are reflective of the principally accepted viewpoints and commonly suggested measures presented by the study participants as they relate to current tenure practices in K-12 education.

**Implication: Utilize student achievement data.** The analysis of the participants’ responses suggests that student achievement data has a role in teacher evaluation, and ultimately should be utilized to some extent when making decisions about teachers being granted, as well as maintaining tenure status. While not universally supported, the majority of the teacher participants noted some value in utilizing student achievement data as one element of a teacher’s evaluation given that there is consideration for the student population being tested, as well as a reflection of overall individual student growth, rather than a normed target.

**Implication: Multiple evaluative measures and multiple evaluators.** Participants noted the need for multiple teacher evaluation components being utilized by multiple evaluators when considering teacher effectiveness. An evaluation system based on a variety of measures and the opinions of multiple evaluators insures that teachers’ evaluations are more unbiased and less subjective than they would be if they were based on one measure, or on the opinion of a single administrator evaluating performance.

**Implication: Tenure reform must address ineffective teachers.** Tenure reform must preclude ineffective teachers from remaining in the classroom. Participants unanimously contend that current tenure practices in K-12 education have the potential to protect underperforming teachers by providing unwarranted job security. Whether it is the result of educator burnout or ineffective teaching methods, participants contended that
the current tenure practices play a role in teachers, who colleagues classify as incompetent, remaining employed as educators despite the implications for their students.

**Implication: Professional development during probationary period.** The probationary term during which a teacher is being considered for tenure should be a rigorous evaluation period that encompasses support and mentorship, which promotes professional growth and development. This implication for practice stems from the overwhelming support and praise given for the practice utilized by the participants’ school district as it relates to the level of support and development afforded to new teachers, and ultimately how said support helped them to grow during their formative years as educators.

**Implication: Reevaluation of tenure periodically.** The overwhelming support of the participants in this study suggests that tenure status should be reevaluated at regular intervals throughout a teacher's career as measure of checks and balances. Participants noted that the current system requires administrators to look into the future and predict what a teacher’s performance will be for decades to come. Despite the varied views of the participants regarding various aspects of tenure practices, all participants unanimously granted support to the idea of tenure being reevaluated periodically throughout a teacher's career, rather than being an all or nothing proposition.

**Conclusion.** Regardless of participants’ anchor positions being favorable or unfavorable of current tenure practices in K-12 education, several common themes and suggestions for tenure reform comprise the implications for practice. An overarching implication for practice based on this research study is that even those who support current tenure practices have concerns with some aspects of tenure and support
reconsidering some aspects in order to promote teacher quality and meaningful teacher evaluation.

**Opportunities for Further Research**

Three distinct opportunities for further research emerged from the findings of this study. Two of the opportunities to further this investigation focus on deepening the understanding of the teacher’s voice as it relates to K-12 tenure. The third opportunity for a future investigation, relates to piloting a tenure reform model, which was discussed within this study and given merit as a viable reform agenda by all of the participants.

An opportunity for future research involves obtaining a more comprehensive depiction of teachers’ viewpoints regarding K-12 tenure practices. Given that this study involved five teachers who taught in a single school district in a rural setting, it would be logical for a further investigation to study teachers’ perceptions of tenure practices across multiple districts, which would allow for consideration of more varied tenure practices than a study within one school district allows. Replicating this study in multiple school districts in a variety of states, communities and settings would add to the validity of the study’s findings and a larger sample would likely provide additional viewpoints regarding the drawbacks and benefits of K-12 tenure.

Analysis of the participants’ interview responses confirmed that reevaluation of tenure at various stages throughout a teacher’s professional career was widely supported as a measure to reform current tenure practices and insure higher teacher quality. Subsequently, an opportunity for future research involves implementing and evaluating a pilot program for a tenure reevaluation both shortly after implementation as well as longitudinally. An investigation of a pilot program for a tenure reevaluation will be
important for determining if such a model is efficacious in addressing concerns with sustained teacher quality as it relates to tenure.

Finally, given that the study focused exclusively on investigating the opinions of tenured teachers, in order to have a more widespread representation and understanding of teachers’ views, it would be logical for a subsequent study to investigate the views of non-tenured teachers regarding tenure practices in K-12 education. The voice of the non-tenured teacher was lacking from this study, and was only represented based on the recollections of the participants regarding their experiences during their probationary period as teachers. From a practical perspective, research involving non-tenured teachers would bring yet another perspective to the conversation involving tenure from those with a vested interest, despite not actually having been granted tenure yet. Additionally, this investigation would allow researchers to determine if the potential for being granted tenure had any bearing or influence on an individual’s decision to enter the field of education when contemplating careers.

Given the scarcity of literature and research investigating and shedding light on teacher’s perceptions of tenure and tenure reform, the opportunities for further investigation are abundant.

**Conclusion: A Final Reflection**

The conversation and debate about tenure practices in K-12 education, as well as tenure reform is engaged upon by scholars, politicians, authors and the news media with frequency and vigor. This qualitative study has filled a deficiency in the literature by extending the essential dialogue to encompass a critical voice that is notably lacking from
the existing literature and media coverage regarding K-12 tenure; that of the tenured teacher.

An important conclusion which emerged from the study is that regardless of teachers’ overarching acceptance or rejection of K-12 tenure practices, all participants granted support for national tenure reform initiatives aimed toward improving the current system and ensuring that schools across the country pervasively employ and retain high quality educators. Ultimately, despite their opinions regarding tenure, their years of service or the subjects they teach, the teachers consistently, universally and wholeheartedly highlighted their contention that all students deserve a dedicated and engaged teacher in every classroom they encounter.

While the national debate regarding tenure practices in K-12 education becomes more wide-ranging and potentially more volatile and contentious, important consideration and ample representation must be given to the inclusion of the teachers’ voices.
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Appendix A

Interview #1

Institution: Northeastern University

Interviewee (Title and Name): ______________________________________

Interviewer: Jennifer Walsh-Rurak

Date: _____________________________

INTRODUCTION

Part I:

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share based on your experiences related to tenure practices in K-12 education. My research project focuses on K-12 educators with a particular interest in current local and national tenure practices, as well as tenure reform initiatives. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into teachers’ unique perspectives about tenure in K-12 education.

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. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and that only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be transcribing the tapes, and only a pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to the tapes and my notes, and both will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).
I have planned this interview to last no longer than 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time? (After providing answers to interviewee’s questions) Okay, let’s begin the interview. I will begin recording now.

Participants will respond to the following questions during the initial interview:

1. Describe your professional preparation, years as an educator and background in education, including how long you have been a tenured teacher.

2. Describe the positive aspects or benefits of the current tenure practices in your district.

3. Describe a specific situation, or provide a specific example of a time when tenure served as a benefit to you personally, or to another teacher with whom you work.

4. Describe any concerns you have or notable drawbacks related to the current tenure practices in your district.

5. From your own experience, how, if at all, being granted tenure affected your feeling of instructional and academic freedom?

6. Describe how, if at all, the job security affiliated with tenure status influenced your decision to seek a career as an educator?

7. How would you respond if you were told that your tenure protections were going to be eliminated?

8. If a politician or educational reformer solicited your opinions about how to change current tenure practices what would you recommend?
Appendix B

Interview #2

Institution: Northeastern University

Interviewee (Title and Name): ________________________________

Interviewer: Jennifer Walsh-Rurak

Date: ________________________________

INTRODUCTION

Part I:

Introductory Protocol

As you are aware from our previous interview meeting, you have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share based on your experiences related to tenure practices in K-12 education. As a reminder, my research project focuses on K-12 educators with a particular interest current tenure practices, as well as tenure reform initiatives. As I explained the last time we met, through my study I hope to gain more insight into teachers’ unique perspectives related to tenure in K-12 education and to identify teachers’ opinions and viewpoints based on their experiences with tenure practices.

As previously, 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. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be transcribing the tapes, and only a pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to the tapes and my notes, and both will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

As you may recall from our last meeting, you signed a consent form, which stated that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form?
I have planned this interview to last no longer than 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. I will provide you with a copy of the interview questions to refer to while we are speaking. Do you have any questions at this time? (Following providing answers to interviewee’s questions) Okay, we will begin the interview and I will begin recording now

Participants will respond to the following questions during the second interview:

1. In a 2011 survey by Harvard University's Program on Educational Policy and Governance (PEPG), 55 percent of respondents favored awarding tenure on the basis of student progress on state tests; 20 percent opposed it (the rest neither favored nor opposed). How do you respond to the idea that tenure status should be linked to teacher evaluations? In your view what benefits and drawbacks result from linking tenure to evaluation?

2. Changes linking tenure status to teacher evaluation was cited as one of the reasons the teachers in Chicago chose to go on strike in 2012. School leaders and administrators countered that the current tenure practices protect ineffective teachers and prevent them from ensuring that the best educators are teaching in their schools.
   - Do you agree with the teachers or administrators stance in this case? Explain your choice.
   - How would you respond to someone who suggests that the current K-12 tenure practices potentially protect ineffective teachers?

3. 80% of teachers participating in a Gates study (2012) stated that tenure should be reevaluated at various intervals in a teacher’s career. What is your opinion about the notion that teacher’s tenure status should be reevaluated at regular intervals, such as every 3 years, 5 years or 10 years?

4. New Jersey’s tenure law was over 100 years old, and classified as the oldest tenure law for K to 12 education in the country (O’Neil, 2012). In New Jersey the tenure law has been modified so that teachers who get two years of partially effective or ineffective ratings lose their tenure status (Christie, 2012, Brookings Institution speech). What is your opinion of this tenure reform in New Jersey?
5. Proponents of eliminating tenure, note that tenure status is not granted in private schools to operate effectively and thus, is not necessary in public school settings. Please respond to that statement by indicating whether or not you agree, and provide a rationale for your opinion.
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form for a Dissertation Study: Teacher Perceptions of Tenure Practices and Tenure Reform Initiatives in K-12 Education

Principal Investigator Dr. Al McCready; Student Researcher, Jennifer Walsh-Rurak

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jennifer Walsh-Rurak in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. You are being asked because you are a tenured teacher in a K-12 educational setting.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher perceptions of current tenure practices and tenure reform initiatives in K-12 education.

**PARTICIPATION:** You will be invited to participate in a series of three interviews. It is expected that your participation will take about 60 minutes for the first two interviews, and 30 minutes or less for the third interview.

**RISKS & BENEFITS:** There are no risks anticipated as a result of your participation in the study; however, if you become uncomfortable with any of the questions being asked, please alert me and we will move on to the next question. It is expected that this research will benefit the field of education, by providing the teacher perspective of tenure in K-12 education.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Participation is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will in no way affect your current or future relationship with Northeastern or its faculty, students, or staff, nor your relationship or employment status within the school district. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations resulting from this study. All three interviews will be audio taped. Written notes will also be taken during all three interviews. All of your responses will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. This researcher will be
transcribing the tapes, and will use a pseudonym to label the tapes. This researcher will be the only people privy to the tapes and to the written notes from the interviews, and both will be destroyed after one year of being transcribed.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at 585-413-8637 or rurak.j@husky.neu.edu. You can also contact my research advisor, Dr. Al McCready at A.McCready@NEU.edu. The Northeastern Institutional Review Board has approved this project.

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

**Is There Anything Else You Should Know**
I was the Principal at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx District.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation in this research project answered. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research.

Signature of Participant ________________________________
Printed Name of Participant ___________________________ Date ________
Signature of Researcher_______________________________ Date ________
Appendix D

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION
RENEWAL APPROVAL

Date: March 12, 2014
Principal Investigator(s): Anita Kite
                              Jennifer Walsh-Rurak
Department: Doctor of Education
            College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
           Northeastern University
Title of Project: Hearing the Teacher’s Voice: Teacher Perception of Tenure in K-12 Education
Approval Status: Closed to Enrollment – Ongoing Analysis Only
Participating Sites: Superintendent Permission Letter on File
Original Protocol Approved: March 26, 2013
DIIHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: N/A
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: MARCH 11, 2015

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

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

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

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