A qualitative study of new secondary teacher attrition in an Iowa urban school setting

James E. Dostal

University of Northern Iowa

Copyright ©2012 James E. Dostal

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd

Part of the Secondary Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
Dostal, James E., "A qualitative study of new secondary teacher attrition in an Iowa urban school setting" (2012). Dissertations and Theses @ UNI. 503.
https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd/503

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses @ UNI by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.
Copyright by

JAMES E. DOSTAL

2012

All Rights Reserved
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF NEW SECONDARY TEACHER
ATTRITION IN AN IOWA URBAN SCHOOL SETTING

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Gregory Reed, Chair

Dr. Michael J. Licari
Dean of the Graduate College

James E. Dostal

University of Northern Iowa

December 2012
ABSTRACT

The teaching profession is constantly changing and with it comes the challenges and difficulties of teaching in the 21st century. The challenge of the teaching profession for new teachers creates various levels of differing frustrations. These various frustrations are the reason why new teacher attrition is high not only in the United States but also more specifically, in the urban setting of Iowa schools. The focus of this study is to provide current explanations of why new teachers decide to leave teaching within the first five years of entering the profession. With the intent of understanding why specific teachers decided to leave the education profession in an urban Iowa secondary education setting.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used to understand why several new high school teachers (grades 9 through 12) in an Iowa urban school setting decided to leave the field of education within their first five years of employment. These interviews were designed to give the previously new teachers the opportunity to share their thoughts, experiences, insight, and advice concerning the challenges of being a new teacher. In addition, the study attempted to illuminate the factors perceived to be paramount to their decision to exit the teaching profession.

The research offers a number of implications for educators. The study maintained a focus on the varying factors in an urban teaching setting that may cause new teachers to leave the profession. The data collected from this study could assist school administrators with professional development for new teachers. In addition, it could define the differences between student teaching and professional teaching.
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF NEW SECONDARY TEACHER ATTRITION IN AN IOWA URBAN SCHOOL SETTING

A Dissertation
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Gregory Reed, Chair

Dr. Thomas Connors, Committee Member

Dr. Nadene Davidson, Committee Member

Dr. James Kelly, Committee Member

Dr. Nicholas Pace, Committee Member

James E. Dostal
University of Northern Iowa
December 2012
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the students and teachers of Jefferson High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, who have faced struggles in life but continue to persevere and succeed. Without knowing it you motivated me to continue in this dissertation process because I watched you on a daily basis continued to try and many times succeed in almost every task that was attempted.

Especially to the students of Jefferson High School, they have consistently exhibited one of the key lessons of life that exemplifies itself daily and that is the ability to keep moving forward towards your goals. Through your time and dedication, through the people who doubted and nay-sayed your efforts, through the trials and tribulations of the events, these obstacles cause for a valued accomplishment and a better citizen in all aspects of society. Thank you for showing me the courage and determination to keep moving forward.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely appreciative of the efforts of many individuals who provided guidance and support throughout this study. My committee members, Dr. Greg Reed, Dr. Thomas Connors, Dr. Nadene Davidson, Dr. James Kelly, and Dr. Nicholas Pace who provide time, guidance, and direction to me in a multitude of ways. Their support for this research has been inspiring and respected, along with their patient teamwork approach in the process of this work.

I am deeply indebted to the chair of my committee, Dr. Greg Reed. It has been my privilege to learn educational leadership throughout my educational career as well as the doctoral process from him. His leadership, intelligence, motivation, and collaborative spirit continue to be a driving force in my development as a professional educator.

Obviously I acknowledge and feel privileged by the participants of this study who agreed to take time out of their schedules to share their personal stories regarding their teaching experience. Their openness in sharing their life events, while sometimes difficult, is highly respected and honored.

I am fortunate to have a wife, Amber, who was consistently patient and understanding throughout these many years when I would need a weekend to work on this project or we would postpone an activity because this dissertation came first. She is the most important part of my life and a vital part of this project that deserves the highest level of reverence with it finally being completed.
For my family, Chuck, Sue, Randy and Lori Dostal, who were supportive and understanding throughout this specific undertaking, but also supportive and understanding in all of my goals and aspirations throughout life.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. viii

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................. ix

CHAPTER I: CONTEXT OF STUDY ..................................................................................... 1
   Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1
   Statement of Problem ....................................................................................................... 6
   Assumptions ..................................................................................................................... 7
   Limitations ....................................................................................................................... 7
   Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 9
   Methodology ................................................................................................................... 11
   Definitions of Terms ....................................................................................................... 12
   Organization of the Study ............................................................................................... 13
   Summary ......................................................................................................................... 14

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ............................................................................. 15
   Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 15
   Recent Teacher Attrition Trends .................................................................................... 17
   Iowa Teacher Workforce ............................................................................................... 23
   The Iowa Urban Education Network ............................................................................ 24
   The Iowa Area Education Agencies ............................................................................. 25
   Why Teachers Leave the Profession ............................................................................ 27
      Teacher Retirement ..................................................................................................... 27
      Teacher Compensation ............................................................................................... 28
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rationales</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tipping Points and Trigger Event</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Percent Change in Average Annual Salaries for Public School Teachers</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher Attrition by Year</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. GWAEA New Teacher Attrition</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
CONTEXT OF STUDY

Introduction

Teacher attrition within the United States public education system has raised an alarm for school district human resource departments and building principals based on the trend that new teachers are leaving the profession at perceived higher rates than ever before in recent education employment history. Teacher attrition has been a serious problem in the United States as far back as the late 1950s (Martinez-Garcia & Slate, 2008). Over the last 50 years, the problem of retaining quality teachers seemed to be concentrated within less affluent schools (Ingersoll, 2001). Although this is still a major issue in low socio-economic communities throughout the United States, the reality is that teacher attrition is affecting every school district, regardless of economic level.

There have been many articles, books, and studies written to address the severity of the problem of teacher attrition, currently seen as a pattern within the United States. As such, teacher attrition has become an issue drawing national attention. The reality of the situation, however, is that very few school districts across the country have come to a consistent, reliable answer regarding how to stop the attrition of their teachers to other professions (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2004).

One third of teachers leave the education profession during the first five years of service; 50% or more leave urban schools (Fuller, 2002). Ingersoll, Smylie, and Miretzky (2004) cited the commonly held argument that the number of teachers leaving the field is based on the baby-boomers leaving the profession and hence an artificial
number reflecting not as much a problem for new teachers, but a statistical trend focused on the aging workforce. Ingersoll et al. (2004) reported that as many as 33% of new hires leave teaching altogether in their first three years and 46% leave in the first five years.

In addition, multiple research studies have identified that the best and the brightest of new teachers are often the first to leave the profession. It is assumed, from a public perspective, that teachers salaries in relation to other career choices are low, and that this is one of the major reasons teachers leave the teaching profession. However, specific research tends to contradict this commonly held perception. In a survey done in 2004, the number one stated reason of roughly 50% of teachers exiting the profession was dissatisfaction specific to a lack of support by school administration. An additional 25% of teachers who left the workforce cited student-discipline as the main motive for their departure (Ingersoll et al., 2004).

Not only does teacher attrition have a negative impact for the continuity of student learning, school effectiveness, and the stability of communities in which they serve, but teachers who leave the profession are also very costly in various measures to local school districts. Describing the magnitude of financial waste resulting from teacher attrition, the Nobscot Corporation (2000) cited that a school district with roughly 10,000 teachers and an annual teacher turnover rate of 20% would save roughly half a million dollars a year by reducing teacher turnover by just one percentage point. These financial savings were determined by the Nobscot Corporation based on current cost of hiring data.

In the last 25 years, there has been an intense discussion between educators, human resource directors, educational researchers, and government policy-makers on the
variables that have influenced teacher attrition. Some rationales for increasing teacher attrition include being underpaid, concerns about personal safety, and blame placed upon teachers for all of society’s shortcomings (Moulthrop, Calegari, & Eggers, 2005). Other factors have also been noted, such as teachers’ lack of opportunities for advancement, as well as teachers’ belief that they are not respected and/or appreciated as primary factors affecting teacher attrition (Moulthrop et al., 2005).

In addition, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2002) concluded that the teacher shortage is but a symptom of the teacher attrition problem, and that the school districts that have the highest frequency of under-qualified, under experienced teachers were urban, rural, and minority communities. The message from the research is that urban and rural schools are having a difficult time due to the specific demands on teachers in both geographical settings. However, both urban and rural schools present similar issues, such as challenges with large minority populations. Site specific issues also add to the teacher attrition problem, contributing to the multitude of reasons for why new teachers are leaving the profession.

The state of Iowa fits into the cited urban, rural, and minority classification for teacher retention. Iowa has historically been an outstanding place to teach in relation to other states. However, due to current economic and social conditions, school districts in the state of Iowa are now facing the same national issues with regard to teacher retention, especially in urban schools.

As of 2009, the state of Iowa has been composed of varying sizes of school districts. Some of the school districts are large, defined as over 7500 students, with a
total of 10 of these school districts across the state. On the opposite end of the spectrum are the Iowa small school districts, defined as less than 300 total students, with a total of 53 of these school districts in Iowa. In the 2008-2009 school year there was a total of 361 Iowa school districts, serving a school population of 470,563 K-12 students (Iowa Department of Education [IDOE], 2009).

The difficulties of attracting, recruiting, and retaining teachers have been well documented (Ingersoll, 2003b; MacDonald, 1999; Markow & Cooper, 2009; Osterholm, Horn, & Johnson, 2006), but gaps remain in the current knowledge of Iowa’s teacher attrition, specifically among teachers with five years or less of teaching experience. Little qualitative research has been done exploring why so many teachers in urban settings have left education entirely. This study identified factors perceived to have contributed to the attrition of new teachers within the Iowa Urban Educational Network (UEN), as identified by the Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA) and specific to the Cedar Rapids Community School District.

The latest figure of teacher attrition, 41.9% of teachers with three years or less in the teaching profession as reported by the GWAEA (2010), was at a significantly higher level than the teacher attrition rate of any other area education agency in the state of Iowa. In comparison to other regions around the country, this is higher than what many experts believe to be acceptable for new teacher attrition. Examples of other areas with a similar level of attrition include Los Angeles, which experienced a teacher turnover rate of 22% and Washington, D.C., with a turnover rate of 25% (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2004).
The considerable increases in teacher attrition have been gradual. Previous administrators in Iowa understood the growing urgency for new teacher retention in urban schools. Accordingly, the urban school leaders began to formally reach out to each other in an attempt to solve a multitude of issues including retention problems.

In 1985, the UEN was founded to help the eight largest school districts of Iowa that had common educational issues. These school districts comprised a student population of 7500 students per district. The eight districts included: Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City, Sioux City, and Waterloo. These school districts are geographically located from the eastern boundary of the state of Iowa along the Mississippi River to the western boundary of the state of Iowa, along the Missouri River. One of the initial objectives of the UEN was to lobby and educate state governmental leaders to pass various state legislative acts to assist in slowing down and possibly ending urban teachers departure from the education profession (Urban Education Network of Iowa, 2010).

Pressures to find and retain the best teachers existed when the UEN was formed and still exists today. Pressure is also being felt by these school districts as they strive to meet the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) for obtaining highly qualified teachers to instruct their students. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) defined a highly qualified teacher as a teacher who holds a bachelor’s degree, obtains full state certification after a two to three year probationary period in the state of Iowa, and demonstrates competency in the academic subject area being taught as determined by the principal of the building (IDOE, 2002). Although federal legislation
of NCLB is one variable (defined from a teacher experience metric), it is not the only unsettling explanation for why there is a large exodus of new teachers leaving the education profession.

**Statement of Problem**

An enormous amount of attention and research has been focused on teacher attrition and retention within the American educational system. Research has shown varying percentages of new teachers leaving the profession of education from just over 16% to as high as 50% in urban school districts (Ingersoll, 2004). A relatively new paradigm within the last 15 years in the teacher attrition discussion is the focus of a possible teaching shortage existing not because of a lack of new teachers being developed, but due to increasing difficulty retaining these individuals once they enter the teaching profession. The greatest obstacles to preventing teacher attrition arise after employment, when teachers quit for various reasons such as differing levels of support, financial considerations, and working conditions (Moulthrop et al., 2005).

The large and constant teacher turnover rate is a reality throughout the United States, and Iowa is no exception. This turnover is specific not only to the urban communities of Iowa, but to the rural communities as well. Both sectors of Iowa education, rural and urban, are having higher than previously considered acceptable levels of attrition.

Teacher attrition not only has a negative effect on student achievement, but it also causes a higher than normal financial investment for the school district. Expenses increase significantly as districts direct more fiscal resources towards recruitment and
professional development of new teachers. These expenses take away from already strapped budgets as schools strive to offer quality education to their students.

This study focused on one specific component of the attrition question: why new secondary teachers are leaving the teaching profession after less than five years in the classroom. More precisely, the research question was:

1. What element(s) influence new teachers' decisions to leave teaching within their first five years?

Assumptions

There are a number of assumptions to consider in this study. First, it was assumed new teachers who enter into the teaching profession as full time employees intend to stay in the teaching profession longer than five years. Second, there was an assumption that teacher attrition can be lowered in school districts with the correct professional assistance plans in place and appropriate leadership to implement these plans. Third, there was an assumption that new teachers that decided to leave the teaching profession have been appropriately prepared for the classroom. Fourth, it was assumed that the new teacher had a desire to be in the teaching profession but became frustrated with the educational setting. Finally, it was assumed that former new teachers who left the profession and were interviewed in this study told their stories with integrity and openness so that others could learn from their experiences.

Limitations

All research studies have specific limitations, and this study is no exception. Due to the qualitative interview procedures formulated for this study, broad-based
generalizations may be affected. Although this study provided a clearer picture as to why these teachers left, it was not intended to describe reality for every teacher.

Data was gathered through semi-structured one-on-one interviews with new secondary teachers who left their teaching positions with the Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD). Cedar Rapids meets the urban school district criteria in the state of Iowa. The six teachers that participated in this study each met the criteria of having at least one year but not more than five years of experience in the teaching profession.

The experience of the teacher could be a combination of experiences from varying places. An example of this could be a participant who has taught two years in one school district and two years in the Cedar Rapids Community School District for a total of four years of experience. Because of this limited sampling group, the ability to generalize is greatly reduced.

Coping strategies are also highly individualized. Consequently, it is difficult to isolate the reasons that some new teachers are more successful in overcoming the challenges of the teaching profession, while others seem ill-equipped to make the necessary adjustments. An assumption can be made that some new teachers inherently strategize to be successful, while other new teachers experience difficulty taking this step on their own. In other words, some new teachers assimilate into the school culture of teaching more readily than other new teachers.

It is difficult to measure the massive number of variables within a school teacher’s day, or for that matter, a school year. One example is the culture and climate of
a specific building on the time-of-instruction schedule. Some schools have classes based on block scheduling (normally 90 minute class periods), other schools have some classes that meet every other day, while still others are more traditional, with a standard 45 to 55 minute period that meets every day.

Finally, only secondary teachers who taught in the Cedar Rapids Community School District, an urban Iowa school district, were interviewed. Participant comments were focused from the perspective of a specific experience based on personality and/or personal issues that might not be specifically stated. An example of this might be the former new teachers who did not get along with some of their students but will not specify names in the study.

Despite these limitations, this study addressed new teachers' knowledge, opinions, and attitudes about attrition and retention, respective to their point of view and experience. Consequently, this study provided pertinent and needed information on which future research can be built. In addition, the study may be of use to teacher education programs in designing a more intensive urban education methodology for their students. Based on the extent that school districts often struggle to attract, recruit, and retain new teachers, as noted previously, the study may also help bridge this gap for urban school districts.

**Purpose of the Study**

The focus of this case study was to provide current explanations of why new teachers decide to leave teaching within five years of entering the profession, with the intent to understand why the specific teachers in this study decided to leave the education
profession. The attempt was to focus on the varying factors in an urban teaching setting in the state of Iowa that caused teachers to leave the profession in relation to the Cedar Rapids Community School District. The case study could ascertain if there were similarities among the new teachers who had five years or less teaching experience that left the teaching profession might have been positively mitigated by systems or people within the school district.

In addition, the study aimed to explain how these past new teachers, having had time to reflect, now perceive their former teaching situations. More specifically, what reasons do these former new teachers state as being paramount to their decision to exit the teaching profession? How did conditions or situations, either formal or informal, at the building level as well as the school district level, influence them? What were the differences between student teaching and professional teaching that influenced their attitude for the profession?

The data collected from this study could be used by school districts, specifically human resource departments, to identify possible new teacher issues that, in some cases, caused these teachers to leave the profession. By identifying situations and developing a plan of action to address these concerns, teacher attrition could be lowered, thus saving school districts financial resources and the improvement of continuity in human resources (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2003). This data could help administrators with the professional development of new teachers and could result in time for reflection and understanding by both groups. The data collected could also pin-point the ever-changing challenges facing new teachers in the 21st century.
Methodology

The methodology for this case study included the collection and investigation of data focused on the results of interviewing six individual new teachers. Each of these former new teachers has left the teaching profession with five years or less of experience. Each teacher interviewed taught at the secondary level in the Cedar Rapids Community School District. Parallel to Clifford Geertz's writing entitled *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, in which he discussed that culture consists of "thick description" by the researcher in order for interpretation (Geertz, 1973, p. 6), thick description provides a way for ethnographers to "expose a culture's normalcy without reducing its particularity" (Geertz, 1973, p. 14). Thick description is significant to this study because it allowed access to new teacher viewpoints within the rich context of their specific setting and includes them as members in the research of what has been stated (Geertz, 1973).

The participants in the case study were interviewed on two different occasions, the first being a semi-structured interview in which questions will be presented in an open ended format. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed to identify the reasons why the participants left the teaching profession. The analysis included the differences and similarities in participant’s responses as related to their respective teaching situations. The analysis also included what these past teachers identified as possible support systems that could have been in place for their continued success in the teaching profession.
A second open-ended interview was conducted as a reflective interview with the participants, so that they can have time to reflect on the questions and comments of the first interview to see if they were consistent with their conclusions and beliefs regarding why they left the teaching profession. A week before the second interview was conducted, a written narrative of their initial interview responses was supplied for their review. The individual participants were asked to review their individual statements to determine whether the researcher was correct in the collection narrative. The concept of member checking in the authenticity of the first interview is a significant procedural step. The second interview is designed to extend the conversation to attain additional context regarding the insights of new teachers.

Definitions of Terms

The terms used in this study and their definitions are as follows:

Attrition: When a school teacher begins teaching in one school year, leaves a school teaching assignment during or at the end of that school year and does not return the following school year (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997).

High school: A school student population that is comprised solely of ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders.

Secondary school: A school student population that is comprised solely of ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders.

New teacher: A new teacher is any first through fifth year teacher in public education that was assigned a mentor.
School District: A special district that is responsible for providing elementary and secondary instruction to citizens normally between the ages of 4 and 18.

Semi-Structured Interview: An interview between the participant and researcher in which the researcher will ask a standard question but can individually tailor questions to get clarification or probe the participant’s reasoning.

Teacher: A teacher is defined as a full-time or part-time teacher who teaches any regularly scheduled classes in any of grades pre-K to 12th grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

Teacher Retention: Teacher retention refers to the proportion of teachers in one year who are still teaching in the same school the following year.

Thick Description: An ethnographer’s method to expose an event or happening within a cultural normalcy without reducing its particularity (Geertz, 1973).

Urban School: An urban school is located in a community, city, town, or school district with a population of 50,000 or more residents. In Iowa, the urban school would be defined as a school district with a population of 7,500 or more students (IDOE, 2009).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five specific and distinct chapters. Chapter I presents an introduction, statement of the problem, assumptions, limitations, purpose of the study, methodology, definition of terms, and organization of the paper. Chapter II provides a review of the literature with regard to current teacher attrition and teacher retention, the recent history of teachers leaving the profession in the United States and how some school districts are dealing with the attrition issue. Chapter II provides an examination of
the difficulties urban school districts face in overcoming the trend of new teacher attrition, along with specifics of Iowa, the Iowa Urban Education Network, and the Grant Wood Area Education Agency.

Chapter III describes the methods used in the study, an explanation of each of the participants along with their experiences in the field, and the procedures used by the researcher for data collection. Chapter IV interprets and identifies the general themes of the participants of this qualitative study. Chapter V features the results and includes implications for individual teachers, those who would be mentors to young teachers, school districts, policy makers, and teacher education programs, as well as recommendations regarding further study implications for school districts and recommendations for further study.

Summary

The teacher retention issue has been and continues to be a national concern that could be defined as a crisis. With public expectations and scrutiny increasing by federal, state, and local school district governance, urban and rural school districts in the United States will continue to have financial resources wasted and new teachers will continue leaving the profession. It is the responsibility of lawmakers, school administrators, and community leaders to find solutions to the high teacher turnover that adversely affects schools.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, a large body of literature addressing the factors causing teachers to leave the teaching profession has been written. A thought construct has permeated throughout the wide variety of different literature sources, whether real or perceived, that normally all teachers who quit the profession seem to be able to identify the cause for their leaving the profession. From a national perspective, teacher attrition tends to result from factors related to negative externalities of what they initially considered their chosen career. However, relatively little research has been conducted on the specific factors causing new teachers in an urban setting of Iowa, specifically in the Cedar Rapids Community School District of the Grant Wood Area Education Agency service area, to leave the profession. Throughout this chapter, there will be a sequential examination of the existing literature on recent teacher attrition trends, the Iowa teacher workforce, the reasons why teachers leave the profession, the financial cost of teacher attrition, and finally, new teacher quality and attrition issues.

The research that does exist at a national level is geographically based and is from a different perspective that is sometimes counter to the educational landscape of Iowa. This perceived difference is most likely due to Iowa’s low population in relation to other states, inclusive of urban students and teachers. Iowa has a little more than three million citizens (1% of the total population of the United States) and fewer than 500,000 K-12 students in the state’s public schools (IDOE, 2009). This total enrollment figure is small.
when compared to many other states. As a result, educators and citizens across the country have a preconceived notion that teachers in Iowa have different problems than educators in, for example, the Dade County School District of Florida or the Los Angeles Unified School District of California, and many places in between. The reality is that teachers across America are having the same professional issues, regardless of location.

Teachers play an integral role in the development of a child. Therefore, if the nation, and more specifically Iowa, expects high quality public education, then more attention at the state and local school district levels must be focused on the concerns and needs of teachers. The attrition problem in public education remains critical, although it has been recognized for at least 20 years (Markow & Cooper, 2009). For example, the 2009 MetLife survey of the American Teachers stated:

Beginning in 1990, a series of three Surveys tracked the experience of new teachers from the time they finished college and accepted positions through the first and the second years of teaching. The portrait was one of declining optimism and enthusiasm for teaching. Prior to beginning to teach, 83% agreed strongly that they “can make a difference in the lives of their students;” after the second year 71% agreed. At the outset, 28% agreed that “many children come to school with so many problems that it’s difficult for them to be good students,” and after two years, 50% agreed. A fifth of the new teachers (19%) were very or fairly likely to leave the profession in five years, with significantly greater discouragement for teachers in high schools, urban schools and schools with large numbers of minority and low-income students. (Markow & Cooper, 2009, p. 13)

The fact that nearly 20% of new teachers decide in less than five years of beginning their teaching careers that they will likely leave the profession creates a problem for school districts. An important question to consider is what is causing new teachers, who have experienced teaching situations during their undergraduate studies, to become disenchanted and leave the field of education after a maximum of only five
years. The following pages will attempt to answer some of these questions based on past research literature.

**Recent Teacher Attrition Trends**

More than 25 states have enacted legislation to improve teacher recruiting and professional development, Iowa being one of these states (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Simultaneously, teacher turnover in some urban schools is as high as 48% in certain parts of the United States (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Historically, this teacher attrition trend seemed to be concentrated in large urban areas or rural areas of the United States, while most Midwest states bucked the large attrition trend for new teachers entering the profession.

Many Midwestern colleges and universities have had an abundance of new teachers graduating every year. There were, and are, many job fairs solely for future new teachers held on college campuses, where human resource recruiters were sent from public school districts across the nation to try and fill their specific teaching vacancies (Hare, Nathan, Darland, & Laine, 2000). The University of Northern Iowa teacher job fair scheduled for the spring of 2009 had school district representatives participating from as far away as Alaska (Bering Strait School District), Texas (Aldine Independent School District – Houston), Arizona (Tucson Unified School District) and the University of Northern Iowa Overseas Placement Service for Educators (University of Northern Iowa, 2010).

From a national perspective, the teacher attrition statistics have remained fairly consistent over the last 23 years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008).
In the 1987-88 school year, 6.4% of the teacher workforce left education before their retirement age. In the 1990-1991 school year, 6.0% of the teacher workforce left education. In the 1993-1994 school year, the figure increased slightly to 7.3% of the teacher workforce left education and in the 1999-2000 school year, 7.8% of teachers left the workforce (NCES, 2008). Of the roughly 3.2 million teachers employed in the 2003-2004 school year, 8% left the teaching profession, representing 256,000 teachers.

These rates are sometimes higher for younger teachers (age 30 or younger). Among the subgroup of public school teachers aged 30 years or younger, the attrition rate was 20% for the 2003-2004 school year, compared with the overall 8% figure for the same year (NCES, 2005). A much less drastic difference was noted in 2004-2005, in which the overall attrition rate was 8.4% with the sub-group of teachers aged 30 years or under approaching 9%. Even more troubling is research that demonstrates the fact that new teachers, defined as having four years or less experience, are leaving at a substantially higher rate. In 2007, California’s attrition rate was a startling 22% (Futernick, 2007). Attrition statistics were also alarming in Washington, DC, where the figure was a shocking 25% (Buckley et al., 2004).

It is clear that from a national perspective, the numbers are moving upward, reflective of close to 10% of the total teaching workforce leaving the teaching profession on a yearly basis (NCES, 2005). What does this really mean? Applying some simple math, we can use a conservative number of 10% to represent the teaching attrition workforce, and if each percent represents 34,500 teachers, then the 10% attrition rate would be at a total of 345,000 teachers. More importantly, what the number really
represents is that there will be 345,000 classrooms with new teachers in them, which will
directly affect an average of 20 students per classroom, for a total student population of
6.9 million students (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004).

Thirty-three percent of new teachers leave within the first three years, and almost
50% leave in five years (Ingersoll, 2003b). With this high rate of attrition being close to
50%, for every two new teachers a school district employs, one of them will leave the
profession just at the time when they should be able to consistently improve student
achievement (Ingersoll, 2001). How does teacher continuity affect the consistency of
student achievement? A more rhetorical question is, what happens to the student who
receives a first year teacher in his/her fourth grade class, then a first year teacher in
his/her fifth grade class, and then a first year teacher in his/her sixth grade class?

Studies cited throughout the last 20 years have inferred that the effect of an
increase in the salary of a teacher was in direct correlation to whether or not those
specific teachers stayed in or left the profession. Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2002)
studied teachers in the state of New York between 1993 and 1998 who transferred to
other districts when the salary increase was from 4% to 15%. Gritz and Theobald (1996)
used data from roughly 10,000 teachers from the state of Washington between the years
1981 to 1992 and found that white female teachers were less likely to leave if their school
districts’ salaries were high relative to salaries of other occupations. Hall, Pearson, and
Carroll (1992) surveyed 416 teachers in a large Florida school district during the early
1990s regarding whether they planned to stay in the teaching profession. Those who
were thinking of leaving the profession consistently cited salary as the first of a number of factors affecting their exit decision.

Teacher shortages affect schools across the country in differing degrees, with urban and rural schools experiencing some of the largest attrition rates. Both have unique and different challenges when discussing teacher retention issues. For this study, the focus was on the urban district, specifically on a secondary high school.

The teacher shortage in the United States began in the twentieth century with a cause-effect political reaction to the Soviet launching of Sputnik, the first man-made satellite launched into space on October 4, 1957. The United States reaction was passing legislation entitled The National Defense Education Act of 1958. This billion dollar federal expenditure plan was focused on the development and restructuring of math, science, and language curriculums in public schools. It allowed for new construction of physical facilities at schools and universities and offered grants for college students up to $1000 per year if they chose to pursue teaching math, science, or language (Devine, 1993).

In 1965, President Johnson was a catalyst for the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which financially assisted colleges and universities across the country that developed teacher-training programs in partnership with local school districts. These programs were attempts to target young college students for recruitment into the field of education and teaching in poor urban and rural school districts. The program was called Teacher Corps and was developed as a result of the shortage of teachers in poor urban and rural school districts throughout the United States.
In 1981, President Ronald Reagan ended the Teacher Corps program with the signing of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act. The Teacher Corps would be completely transitioned to termination in 1983. The Teacher Corps was controversial due to the rights of states in educational responsibilities, but it did assist in the development of over 100,000 new teachers (Stein, 2004).

The idea of Teacher Corps was redesigned into a federal program called Teach for America. Teach for America received federal support through the AmeriCorps program, originally introduced by President Clinton and passed by Congress as the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Teach for America was aimed at assisting low-income communities by having new college graduates teach for two years or longer in identified low-income urban and rural schools (Democratic Leadership Committee [DLC], 1999).

Ironically, in 1994, the United States Department of Education announced that two million new teachers would be necessary to replace the baby boomer retirements from the late 1950s and early 1960s. A teacher recruitment initiative was put into place to correct the shortfall resulting in 2.25 million new teachers. Unfortunately, 2.7 million teachers left or retired during that same six year time frame (Ramirez, 2009).

President George W. Bush was the latest president in proposing an effort to train more K-12 math and science teachers. He continued efforts to advance the American Competitiveness Initiative, which has since been replaced by the America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science Act of 2007, reauthorized as of July 22, 2010. As has been documented over the
past 50 years, there were major federal programs to promote the training of more and better qualified teachers, only to have the specific program scrapped or reworked due to the inability of the program to be successful (Ramirez, 2009).

As far back as 1996, there were warning signs with regard to teacher attrition in urban school settings. In a policy paper entitled, *Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty* (Lippmann, Burns, & McArthur, 1996), the writers evaluated the unique challenges that urban schools across the country were facing. Included were specifics of growing student enrollments, higher rates of teacher retirement, specific state mandated class size reduction initiatives, and demanding better working conditions for teachers.

Urban schools were also educating between 40 and 50% of the students across the country who were not proficient in English, slightly less than 50% of the country’s minority students, and 40% of the country’s low income students. In addition, urban schools also had the lowest level of student achievement, the highest drop-out rates, and a large number of students identified as needing special need services. Unfortunately, the current trend remains consistent with regard to urban school districts across the nation (Lippman et al., 1996).

Iowa has typically remained below the national average of teacher attrition, dating back to 1998-1999 where the statewide figure was 7.8% (Hare et al., 2000). The attrition calculation can be somewhat misleading because it is based on the broad collection of data that is inconclusive in discerning the number of new teachers who are leaving the profession. This specifically means the number is not broken down in order to
distinguish the differences between new teachers or retiring teachers, teachers from urban settings versus teachers from rural settings, or teachers in secondary education (grades 7 through 12) from teachers in elementary education (grades K through 6). What is known through the limited data collected by Iowa in the 1998-1999 school year in comparison to the next seven years is that the attrition levels increased (Chadwick, 2007).

Ingersoll (2002) compared the teacher replacement and attrition rates to the analogy of a hole in a bucket. As such, Ingersoll indicated that new teachers are going in at the top of the bucket and then quickly exiting at the bottom. His argument suggested that teacher shortages are due to retaining teachers and not the lack of recruitment.

Iowa Teacher Workforce

The Iowa teacher workforce attrition rate is more difficult to summarize and compare with the national attrition rates because this statistic was not collected directly by the Iowa Department of Education on a consistent basis before 1998. Iowa does, however, have attrition rates for the school years 1987-1988, 1990-1991, 1993-1994, and all school years after 1998 (IDOE, 2009). In the advent of consistent data from the Iowa Department of Education before 1998, the conclusion could be made that Iowa did not perceive a problem with teacher attrition at that time. However, such apathy clearly no longer exists.

The data collected in select years with regard to Iowa teacher attrition by the Iowa Department of Education gradually began to reflect the national trend of teachers leaving the profession at higher rates. The difference of Iowa teacher attrition from the 1987-1988 school year of 6.4% of the teacher workforce leaving education to the 2003-2004
school year of 9.0% of teachers leaving the profession of education demonstrates the attrition rate was increasing throughout school districts in Iowa (IDOE, 2008).

The Iowa Urban Education Network

There is more to the attrition statistics than a general figure for the whole state of Iowa, due to the complexity of Iowa school districts themselves. Iowa school districts have distinct differences depending on their geographic area. For example, western Iowa school districts are primarily rural in nature, while school districts in central Iowa, specifically in Polk County, tend to be urban and suburban. In addition, many school districts in eastern Iowa also have a tendency to be in urban and suburban settings.

Obviously, there are exceptions to the size of school districts across the state of Iowa. Because of the divergent needs of these large urban school districts versus the rural and suburban school districts, an organization of school districts was developed to address the similar issues among urban districts. As a result of these concerns the Urban Educational Network (UEN) was incorporated in 1993 as a 501(c)3 corporation that included the school districts of the Cedar Rapids Community School District, the Council Bluffs Community School District, the Davenport Community School District, the Des Moines Community School District, the Dubuque Community School District, the Iowa City Community School District, the Sioux City Community School District, and the Waterloo Community School District (UEN, 2010; Appendix A).

Based on the Urban Education Network website (2010), the UEN accounts for a little over 25% of the total K-12 student population in the state of Iowa. These eight school districts enroll 54.1% of the minority students in the state and 50% of Iowa's
limited English speaking students. They also serve 35.1% of K-12 students receiving free or reduced price meals and employ 23.6% of the entire K-12 certified teacher workforce of the state of Iowa (UEN, 2010).

The Iowa UEN is experiencing the same education-based issues as urban school districts across the United States. With this concept in mind, there are considerable similarities among urban districts nationwide, including Iowa. These similarities include the need for increasing student test scores, academics standards, and student preparation; decreasing student dropout rates; solving school management issues; receiving more parental support; and increasing the supply of qualified teachers (Markow & Cooper, 2009).

The Iowa Area Education Agencies

In the spring of 1974, the Iowa Legislature created an educational assistance plan to assist school districts titled House File 1163, which outlined what would become of Iowa’s 15 area education agencies (AEA). The AEA’s, as they came to be called, began operating effectively on July 1, 1975. With the establishment of the area education agency system, the statistical analysis for teacher attrition was developed from two data sources: the Iowa Department of Education collecting teacher attrition numbers through the specific Area Education Agencies, and the Area Education Agency specific data from the local school districts that they serve (Iowa Area Education Agencies, 2010).

Teacher attrition rates became an issue that both the UEN and AEA’s agreed was becoming a concern for Iowa urban school districts. A point of interest was the statistical difference between one AEA versus all the rest of the AEA’s in the state of Iowa. The
Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA; Appendix B and C) was documenting a very high number for teacher attrition, specifically new teacher attrition. In 2003, they were referencing a 41.9% teacher attrition rate for teachers who had one, two, or three years of experience. GWAEA serves as a combination of large urban and suburban school districts, with the largest district being the Cedar Rapids Community School District (Grant Wood Area Education Agency, 2010).

The figure of 41.9% reported by the GWAEA of new teacher attrition, defined as three years or less in the teaching profession, was at a significantly higher level than the teacher attrition rate of some large urban centers in the United States. For example, Los Angeles had a teacher turnover rate of 22%, and Washington, D.C. had a turnover rate of 25% (Buckley et al., 2004). The definition of the teacher turnover rate in Los Angeles and Washington D.C. is only for teachers leaving the respected district. This is the same for GWAEA, where teachers are leaving the AEA service boundary. In other words, a teacher that leaves a GWAEA school did not get employed by another school district in the Grant Wood service area the following school year or any other Iowa school district.

While the teacher attrition rate is a universal concern, the issue is even more frustrating for school districts in Iowa. Attrition is a particular problem in this area because the core areas of vacancies are focused on special education, math, and science (Pytel, 2007). The teacher candidate pool is reduced even more when considering the competition between urban and rural school districts in the high demand curricular areas such as math, science, and special education (Pytel, 2007).
Why Teachers Leave the Profession

There is a substantial body of literature exploring the factors affecting a teacher's decision to leave the profession (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Moulthrop et al., 2005; NCES, 1997, 2008). One of the largest explanations is based on the ending of a teacher's career through retirement, which is a normal process for all professionals. This is a natural cause of attrition that school districts deal with on a yearly basis across the country, and Iowa is no exception. Other than retirement, another primary cause, from a teacher's perspective, is the monetary consideration of the job. Lastly, the cause of teacher attrition can be related to a number of environmental aspects of the teaching profession (Ingersoll, 2001; Moulthrop et al., 2005).

Teacher Retirement

The first and by far the predominant reason that there is a need for new teachers to enter the American education system is teacher retirement. As a group, elementary and secondary teachers are significantly older than the general labor force (Hussar, 1999). Due to the influence of various events in the United States after World War II, such as the geo-political aspects of the cold war and the baby-boomer phenomena, there were a large number of teachers hired in the late 1960s and 1970s, and this group has begun to exit the profession. Although most teachers in that group are retired, some teachers from that era remain in the classroom. Although retirement is certainly a contributing factor to teacher attrition, it is not as much of a factor in the overall rate of teacher attrition as educational human resource directors might believe, as the number of teachers leaving the teaching profession before retirement age is three to one (National Governors Association, 2000).
Teacher Compensation

The second major reason for teachers leaving the education profession is teacher compensation. When new teachers that were leaving the teaching profession were asked why they were leaving, one of the first reasons teachers mentioned was the lack of a high salary. Unfortunately, the concept of high salary is not defined, due to individual teacher’s definition of what constitutes a high salary.

Research conducted at Sam Houston State University in Texas found in a 2004 survey that 35% of teachers surveyed had an extra job while teaching, compared to 22% in a similar study done in 2002. In addition, 76% of the teachers who had extra jobs felt that the situation was affecting their classroom performance in a negative way. Throughout this study, the respondents averaged a little less than ten hours per week at their second job (Moulthrop et al., 2005, p.343).

From a national perspective, the average teacher pay in the 2008-2009 school year was $54,319 (NEA, 2010b). The average teaching salary in the state of Iowa for the same school year was $48,464 (IDOE, 2009, p. 83). The 10 largest school districts in the state of Iowa, which correspond directly with the UEN, had an average salary of $52,751 in 2008-2009, while the smallest 10 districts in Iowa had an average total salary of $38,113 (UEN, 2010).

In comparison with other Midwest states, Iowa is seventh out of 12 (NEA, 2010b). Illinois is ranked number 1, with an average salary of $60,474 (NEA, 2010b). Further elucidating the situation is a comparison of the average salary for beginning teachers. In 2007, the national beginning teacher salary was $35,284, while in Iowa it
was $30,331, with Iowa being ranked 39th in the country for beginning teacher salary (American Federation of Teachers, 2007, p. 24).

There are many different methods used to evaluate fair salaries for teachers. These include cost of living or specific state and local tax rates compared to other states, as well as gross income verses the fringe benefits. It is easy to be misguided by the statistics, but it should be recognized that the cost of living in Iowa is normally viewed as lower in comparison to other places in the United States (Plunkett, 2010).

According to the cost of living statistical analysis program entitled mysalary.com, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was compared to Chicago, Illinois for a teacher’s salary. The teacher making the average teaching salary in Iowa of $48,638 (NEA, 2010b) would have to make $66,932 to have the same standard of living in the greater Chicago area. What this financial salary information does not show is the definition of the standard of living for a teacher at either location.

However, salaries in Iowa have experienced increases over recent years. On February 18, 2010, Iowa Governor Chet Culver announced that Iowa teacher salaries, which were 37th in the nation in 2009, had moved to 26th ahead of a number of states and the District of Columbia. The average salary in 2010 in the state of Iowa was $48,638, including retirement plans and health care plans (NEA, 2010b).

The National Education Association (2010a) released data considered to reflect a cut in teacher salaries in the United States, citing inflation as the cause.
In a statement released on February 1, 2010, NEA president Dennis Van Roekel stated,

Public school teachers across the nation are continuing to lose spending power for themselves and their families in an already struggling economy. We need to compensate teachers fairly for the work they do. How can we recruit and retain quality teachers for our students if we don't pay them what they're worth? Professional work deserves professional pay. (p. 1)

To support Van Roekel's claim, the NEA additionally released the following chart:

![Percentage Change in Average Annual Salaries for Public School Classroom Teachers, 2000-2009](chart)

*Figure 1. Percent Change in Average Annual Salaries for Public School Teachers (NEA, 2010a)*

In some ways, the characteristics that make teachers great represent a double-edge sword that can possibly create financial conflict once they enter the teaching profession, specifically, financial idealism. On one hand, teachers say that money is not the reason they entered the teaching profession; many teachers enter the profession with the noble concepts of seeing young people improve and making a difference in society (Good,
1993; Lortie, 1973). On the other hand, financial reality does set in after just a few years in the profession, when teachers are faced with financial concerns.

From my personal experiences with student teachers, it appears student teachers do not have an undergraduate education class where they discussed the financial aspects of being a teacher. What does a teacher's paycheck look like? What is withdrawn from a paycheck? What will be the difference between gross and net pay? What is a 401B plan? What types of insurance plans are available?

Most undergraduate students who set out to enter the profession of teaching are naïve and uninformed with regard to the financial realities of being a teacher. In many individual cases, these financial realities are not apparent until they actually enter the profession. In addition, informal observations as a past undergraduate and from formal observations as a staff member at a private small college in Iowa that works directly with students, most undergraduates are single, possibly being assisted by parents to get through college, so being responsible for all their financial needs is not yet a reality for many of these future teachers.

Is this lack of financial education isolated strictly to the teachers in the teaching profession? Obviously not, but many other college degree areas informally teach concepts that tie into personal finance. For example, a business major has specific concepts presented in class in pursuit of their degree. There is a more prevalent attitude for college business students on the concept of making money, whether that is eventually for their clients or themselves, which does not seem to exist for students in the college of education.
A study done by Ingersoll in 2002 showed that 33% of teachers leave the profession within the first three years of their teaching careers and 46% leave within the first five years. Although these new teachers enter the profession with the highest ambitions, they find the extensive pressures of the job and the concerns surrounding their financial well-being add a tremendous amount of stress to their lives (Ingersoll, 2002). Once a child or children are added into the financial equation, many new teachers leave the education profession in an attempt to make substantially more money in another profession (American Federation of Teachers, 2007; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2004; Moulthrop et al., 2005).

Although it is normal to determine what a teacher makes by one number, Goldhaber and Player (2003) have suggested it is more complex than this simple fact gathering system. The authors pointed out that there are four major ways to gauge changes in compensation for teachers. First is growth in real versus nominal salaries; second is average versus starting salaries; third is salaries adjusting for compensating differentials; and fourth are teacher salaries versus other professions (Goldhaber & Player, 2003).

Teacher salaries versus salaries in other professions is a difficult conversation to have with the average citizen who is experiencing a rise in property taxes while viewing local news stories reporting increases in teacher salaries. Too often this citizen makes a direct correlation between these two concepts and assumes the rise in their property taxes is needed to cover the salary increases for teachers who they feel only work 180 days a year. Adding to the confusion, these same citizens see news releases from the governor’s
office stating teacher pay has increased for the third year in a row, even though the country is experiencing a recession (IDOE, 2010).

Of course, an argument often presented is that teachers only work 180 days per year; therefore, they should not receive compensation comparable to employees who work 240 days per year, the average yearly work schedule for other occupations. The core argument used is that when teachers’ yearly salaries are broken down into an hourly wage, the resulting figure is quite large in comparison to the hourly wage of many employees. In an article released in 2004 by the Hoover Institution, Richard Vedder stated that the average wage of a teacher is $29.00 an hour, which is a higher pay rate than civil engineers, architects, editors, reporters, and a host of other professionals (Hess, 2004).

The pay differential correlation is very difficult to explain to the general public when discussing teacher compensation. Teacher compensation is easily assessable by the public because under Iowa state law, school districts are mandated to publish each teacher’s salary yearly. As a result, it seems everyone in the public has an opinion with regard to this aspect of education.

First, almost every American citizen has been in the educational system as a student, so they base their opinions on experiences they had as students. Second, most citizens and students do not see teachers planning and/or grading student work outside of the “contracted” time, even though it happens across the United States as a nightly ritual for most teachers. Third, the concept of worth specific to “time” creates an illusion that is not present in teachers’ work days. Historically, white collar professionals such as
lawyers or accountants “bill out” or charge customers by segments of time. This charge is normally for a single client, while a teacher has anywhere from 20 to 35 students per hour, all being serviced at once (Goldhaber & Player, 2003).

Even the broad-brush comparison of all white collar jobs to the teacher workforce can be a cause for argument. The teaching profession should really be compared to high performance stress jobs such as those of pilots, air traffic controllers, and firefighters. These professions have “time off” constructs within the employees’ work schedules due to the high intensity of their duties (Moulthrop et al., 2005).

In order to evaluate this concept of high stress jobs in comparison to teachers’ jobs, the assistant fire chief of the Cedar Rapids Fire Department was contacted in order to understand the normal schedule of a firefighter. Normally, firefighters have pre-assigned work times and can choose to time swap and can work over-time. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a first year (after a probationary year) firefighter has a schedule which includes one 24 hour day with no training or duties excluding an emergency call after 6:00 PM and a mandatory paid one hour exercise period within their predominant work day defined as 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM. The work schedule includes one 24 hour day working, then 48 hours off, then one 24, then 72 hours off.

Vacation days are earned through seniority with a minimum of seven paid vacation days and 13 paid holidays for first year firefighters. As a senior firefighter, 35 days of vacation can be earned per year. If a firefighter is assigned to work a holiday such as New Year’s Day, then the firefighter is paid holiday pay as well as double time salary compensation. The beginning base salary for a Cedar Rapids firefighter without
overtime consideration is $40,100 (Pulver, personal communication, February 14, 2010).

The base teacher pay for a Cedar Rapids Community School District teacher in the 2009-2010 school year with a Bachelor of Arts degree is $41,000 (Cirivello, personal communication, February 9, 2010).

Teacher compensation is one reason why teachers leave the teaching profession. Despite popular misconceptions with regard to teacher’s pay, salaries are often disproportionate to the quantity and quality of work done. Comparing professional salaries is complicated and has long been a source of lively discussion from all avenues of society, including inside the education profession.

Environmental Aspects

The third major reason for high rate of teacher attrition is specific to environmental aspects of the profession. One of these is the educational system itself. Many teachers leave the education profession because as professionals they find the system of education overwhelming from a change standpoint. The education reality is that schools are businesses that have finite resources with predominant financial allocations assigned annually through government tax modalities determined mostly by student enrollment.

There are many facets of the education system that eventually corrode teacher enthusiasm. Teachers have indicated that they get frustrated due to too little planning time, lack of instructional resources (i.e., textbooks and computers), a lack of collegial support, and what they view as unreliable assistance from the school’s front office and or the district office (Futernick, 2007; Ingersoll, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Inman &
Marlow, 2004; Scholastic, 2010). In essence, teachers who have left the teaching profession indicate that although the financial compensation may not be good, the actual workplace environment is also a major rationale for leaving the profession (Futernick, 2007; Ingersoll, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Scholastic, 2010).


The lack of resources in schools also contributes to teacher job dissatisfaction (Buckley et al., 2004). The reality is that when new teachers enter their classrooms, they are lacking certain things that they feel are necessary to accomplish their objectives (Buckley et al., 2004). Some schools have the available resources to help, but the majority of schools do not because the allocation for school supplies normally happens in the spring of the previous school year. New teachers are often hired after the supply requests are submitted and purchased.

In many cases, the veteran teachers are not receiving what they requested either. In a recent non-scientific survey done by Edutopia in 2008, teachers were asked if they spent money directly from their personal financial resources for their classrooms.
Teacher responses indicated that 93% of them spent a minimum of $100 or more on their students and/or classrooms (Edutopia, 2008).

School facilities, including the physical space of classrooms and the quality of the setting for teachers, do impact the ability of teachers to teach and the students to learn (American Federation of Teachers, 2006). The correlation between the deteriorating physical conditions of school buildings around the country and struggling urban schools has been documented in the media on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *ABC Special Reports by John Stossel*, among others. Urban schools on average are currently close to 50 years old, which is generally the age when increased deterioration begins in school buildings (American Federation of Teachers, 2006).

Many factors contribute to the quality of school buildings beside the physical structure itself. Factors such as the air quality, the temperature of the air, and the lighting of hallways and classrooms must be considered. Some people would argue these factors are all minor irritations by themselves, but when they are examined collectively, the result is that they have a tendency to grind down a teacher’s enthusiasm to teach.

When considering just one area of a school’s atmosphere such as temperature, teachers believe thermal comfort affects both teaching quality and student achievement (Lackney, 1999, 2003). A simple environmental factor such as quality classroom lighting plays a critical role in student and teacher performance. Multiple studies from the mid 1930s to the present have indicated the importance of lighting in a teaching environment for both students and teachers (Jago & Tanner, 1999).
A final factor with regard to the physical conditions within schools that add to
teacher stress is the noise levels in buildings. Teachers have noted the significant and
negative impact of distracting noise levels in their classrooms and schools. Lackney’s
1999 study found that teachers believed the actual noise of a school environment such as
hallways, intercom, and general staff and population noise impairs academic
performance. In addition, Lackney’s 1999 study concluded that external noise causes
more discomfort and lower efficiency levels for teachers than for students.

Improving the quality of school facilities can be expensive, but this type of
improvement can contribute to better teacher retention and thus save money in the long
run. A major facility improvement is normally a one-time expense that lasts for many
years. Buckley et al. (2004) argued that improving teachers’ work environments could be
more cost effective due to the improved teacher retention than a permanent salary
increase for teachers.

A third part of the environmental aspect of the school setting that influences
teacher attrition are the relationships made among teachers themselves. Teaching can be
a very lonely and isolated profession (Carroll, 2007; Nieto, 2009). The reason for this is
that the grade-level teacher starts the first day of school and each following day generally
as the only adult in the classroom. As the day starts, 20 to 30 students enter the
classroom. That class is dismissed, the next class enters, that class is dismissed, and so
on. The day is tightly scheduled and timed, as is the case in many professions, but in a
school environment there is little time to discuss situational aspects of teaching
methodology, classroom management concerns, increased pressure and stress from
higher expectations regarding student achievement on standardized tests, and
administrative support issues with other teachers (Cheng & Cheung, 2004; Ingersoll,

Teaching has always been a very demanding profession and it is even more so
today. One teacher alone deals with several classes of students the entire day. Due to
these demands, new teachers need extra time for assistance in all the previously
mentioned areas (Palmer, 2007).

In many instances, administrators and educators do an injustice to new teachers
who are fresh out of college and are entering their first teaching assignments in our
schools. Too often, the new incoming teachers get classroom assignments that include
the neediest and often the most challenging students. In addition, new teachers
frequently start their careers at hard-to-staff schools, which are typically urban school
districts.

In these schools, resources are usually scarce. Teachers have three to four
preparation assignments in a given instructional day, and in many cases, the new teachers
travel throughout the school like students. Due to limited classroom space, having a
permanent classroom is often not possible (Haberman, 2004; Lambert, 2006; Palmer,
2007; Tillman, 2005).

Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) analyzed data on more than 300,000 Texas
teachers from 1993 to 1996. The authors concluded that school characteristics played a
large role in influencing teacher movement from one school to another and eventually
exiting the profession. The extent of this influence was so great that they suggested in
the conclusion of their paper, "An alternative to raising salaries may be addressing specific working conditions that are associated with the schools serving particular types of students" (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2004, p. 26)

Barnett Berry, president of the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, supported the idea that new teachers are overwhelmed by the initial challenges of assimilation into urban education systems. Berry stated, "Not only are teachers who are new to these schools more likely to be under-prepared, they're also more likely to be under-qualified" (Graziano, 2005). It can be explicitly stated that a number of new teachers go to the "undesirable" places to begin their careers, and these schools normally have the toughest students to work with and often the least administrative support.

**Administrative Support**

The fourth major reason for a high rate of teacher attrition is tied to administrative support. Schools, and specifically principals of those schools, have control over some issues identified by new teachers. Defining administrative support from new teachers' perspective throughout the research literature was specific to class size (Scholastic, 2010), meaningful professional development (Barnett et al., 2008; Ganser, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004), and better communication (Carroll, 2007; Menchaca, 2003; Nieto, 2009). In statistics collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in 2001 examining why teachers were dissatisfied, 8400 public and nonpublic school teachers cited lack of administrative support (38%) as the number one reason and workplace conditions (32%) as the number two reason for dissatisfaction (NCES, 2001).
In a study of public school teachers in the 1990-1991 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 1992 Teacher Follow-Up Survey, Kelly (2004) found undesirable working conditions, specifically the behavioral climates of the respected schools, were directly related to increased teacher attrition. The following excerpt taken from a first year teacher's experience, which highlights this problem:

Not a day went by that I didn't go home and cry, remembers fourth-grade teacher Sue Manley of her first year. Manley, who graduated from Northwestern University with a master's degree in education, thought she was well prepared for her first assignment, teaching at a South Side Chicago elementary school. She had completed her student teaching the previous year at a grammar school in the same neighborhood and had spent four months volunteering as a classroom aide at another urban elementary school. Working with experienced teachers while she was still a graduate student and a volunteer had made teaching look easy to Manley. "Academically, I was prepared. Socially, professionally, and emotionally, I was not." (Graziano, 2005, p. 2)

Sue Manley had a master's degree in education from Northwestern University and felt overwhelmed. In many ways, this is a direct reflection on her building administration. It is imperative for principals to provide the effective leadership needed to help beginning teachers feel encouraged and empowered enough to succeed (Melton, 2007).

Student teaching is just the start of professional development for new teachers. It is imperative that principals are leaders who provide environments that encourage positive relationships with the teaching staff (Johnson & Birkeland, 2002). Although there are many states and school districts that have set up mentoring programs, it is the principal who provides for a culture of learning and support, which in turn allows for the
continued growth of young teachers through interactions with experienced teachers (Young, Fuller, Brewer, Carpenter, & Mansfield, 2007).

It is the principal’s responsibility to communicate effective expectations in an efficient and strategic manner in order to increase new teacher effectiveness within the schools (Melton, 2007). Throughout the research on the correlation between principals’ leadership and young teacher attrition, it was evident school administrators have to be effective and efficient communicators. Principals need to create equitable access to resources for new teachers. These resources should include curriculum maps, curriculum standards, adequate supplies, easy access to data, and a clear explanation of procedures and policies of the school (Brendle-Corum & Haynes, 2004; Davis & Bloom, 1998; Quinn, & Andrews, 2004).

In a survey released in March of 2010 by the Gates Foundation and Scholastic, a textbook publisher, regarding what was needed to improve education in United States schools, the findings seemed to be somewhat shocking in terms of the regular preconceived notions surrounding increasing teacher pay. The survey interviewed 40,000 public school teachers between March of 2009 through June of 2009 and found 68% of teacher respondents overwhelmingly viewed supportive leadership in schools as being absolutely essential in retaining good teachers. This response was overwhelmingly stronger than the responses regarding higher salaries, in which 45% of the teacher respondents said higher salaries would retain good teachers (Scholastic, 2010).

The high skill set principals must possess in order to serve their teachers is one of the criteria that strongly influence teachers’ decisions regarding whether or not to remain
in or to leave education. Principals who are effective have a teaching staff who feel safe, secure, and an important part of the school’s mission (Haberman, 2004).

The results of Chadwick’s (2007) research concluded teachers who had multiple assignments were more likely to leave the teaching profession and therefore high school teachers have a tendency to leave education more than elementary teachers (IDOE, 2007). In addition, Chadwick’s analysis also correlated with Ingersoll’s (2001) noting teachers whose teaching careers began in high-poverty urban-city high schools were less likely to continue in education than teachers in middle schools and elementary schools.

These results coincide with two additional findings regarding non-financial influences in the retention of teachers. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) and Hanushek et al. (2004) found teachers from schools with a large fraction of students who were eligible for the free and reduced breakfast-lunch program were more likely to leave the teaching profession. Secondly, teachers were more likely to stay in teaching if they were working in schools they perceived to include high-achieving students. Hanushek et al. (2004) found that Texas public school teachers were less likely to leave schools with relatively high-achieving students. This parallels a study focused on elementary school teachers of New York City in which Boyd et al. (2009) findings concurred with the Texas public school teachers.

Finally, a factor that might very well be out of the hands of school districts in their attempts to reduce attrition is based on a study done by Inman and Marlow (2004). In the conclusion of their research, Inman and Marlow argued when a community treats
the faculty of their local schools with respect, teachers are more likely to stay in the teaching profession.

Cost of Teacher Attrition

The teaching profession is one of the largest workforce sectors in the United States; there are more teachers than doctors, nurses, and lawyers combined. In real numbers, teachers in the public K-12 educational system make up a little more than 3.4 million employees, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in a survey conducted in May of 2008. School districts across the country are consistently active in recruitment and retention of their instructional staff as a result of the normal difficulties related to retaining teachers. Now with the added pressure on schools due to the federal legislation of NCLB and the increased mandate on teacher quality, school districts are under even more pressure to keep a highly qualified staff (Gurarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006).

The financial cost to school districts across the United States due to teacher attrition is a sizeable amount of money that could be used in other beneficial areas of education if schools could limit the exodus of new teachers. When new teachers leave before they become proficient in their ability to teach at high levels of instruction, which normally happens at the end of the teachers' fifth year of experience, any financial investment in professional development is lost by the school district (Carroll, 2007).

The United States trend line over the past 20 plus years is not surprising based on recent research, most notably that done by the United States Department of Education in a report titled Teacher Attrition and Mobility (2005).
The teacher attrition rate in the state of Iowa seems to be a statistical outlier in relationship to the United States teacher attrition rate. As the 2008-2009 report from the Iowa Department of Education indicated, teacher attrition numbers have decreased. It seems that Iowa’s effort to retain new teachers has improved. Out of the 3,520 first-and-second year teachers who began teaching in the 2007-2008 school year, 3,243 teachers returned for the 2008-2009 school year. This figure indicates a little over 92% remaining of the new teachers who did return the following year. In comparison, the 2000-2001 attrition rate was 87.5%. If Iowa continued to lose teachers in 2008-2009 at the 2000-2001 rate, then 440 teachers would have left teaching rather than 277 (IDOE, 2001, 2008).
Unfortunately, the trend line for the Grant Wood Education Agency is similar to the national trend line with new teacher exodus versus the Iowa Department of Education statistical report that shows a stabilizing situation.

![GWAEA - New Teacher Attrition 2001 to 2005](image)

Figure 3. GWAEA New Teacher Attrition

Although the teacher attrition numbers may be easy to understand, the difficulty lies in the ability to assess the costs of attrition for a school district in their annual budget. These attrition costs are spread out over different line item expenditures including teacher recruitment, costs related to interviewing by a building principal and staff, and initial
training and orientation to both the district and individual buildings for new teachers (Shockley, Guglielmino, & Watlington, 2006).

The state of Iowa understood the attrition problem and actively allocated dollars to try to encourage teachers not to leave the teaching profession. In 2001, the Iowa General Assembly passed the Student Achievement and Teacher Quality Program with an annual appropriation for a variety of programs (Student Achievement and Teacher Quality Program Act, Chapter 284, Code of Iowa, 2001). The section of this legislation that is relevant to new teachers is called the Beginning Teacher Mentoring and Induction program. In the 2002-2003 school year, the Beginning Teacher Mentoring and Induction program was funded with a $2.4 million grant, specifically by the Iowa Legislature through the Department of Education. The Iowa Department of Education allocation table shows that during the 2007-2008 school year expenditures on just the state programs regarding new teacher mentorship programs and Area Education Agencies implementation of these programs was a little over $4.6 million. This number is almost double the amount allocated in 2002. To help with new teacher retention the allocated funds went specifically to the following areas:

- a two year induction program by every new teacher
- an annual statewide mentoring and induction institute
- an annual award program that recognizes outstanding new teacher mentoring
- a mentoring and induction network that operates through the AEA’s
- a mentoring and induction statewide steering committee
- the development of a mentoring and induction model in which school districts and AEA’s can implement
- one statewide survey of new teachers, mentors, and administrators (IDOE, 2008)

It should be noted, $4,678,050 was spent in the 2007-2008 school year on the two year mentoring program and the identified number of new teachers was 3,520 so it could be determined a minimum of $1,328.99 was spent on each young teacher to assist in his or her professional development. (IDOE, 2008). In an agency release by the Iowa Legislative Fiscal Services (2007) it is reported that data on overall retention of teachers appears to show no “significant change since the implementation.”

The United States Department of Labor developed a formula in an attempt to calculate the estimated cost to school districts when they are faced with replacing teachers. Using this U.S. Department of Labor formula, The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) recently completed a national analysis of the cost of replacing teachers who leave the profession and estimated the cost to be $2.2 billion per year. However, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) has an even higher estimate of the national cost of public school teacher turnover figuring it could be as high as $7.3 billion a year (Carroll, 2007). Tracking the cost of losing teachers not only brings focus to the issue of the negative effects on student learning and teacher quality, but even more significantly it points out the fact the efforts needed to maintain high teacher quality is whittling away finite dollars from school districts. Schools and school districts with high attrition rates
incur significant expenses associated with their annual recruitment campaigns. Research done by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF, 2007) in five school districts throughout the United States showed the costs related to attrition were different in each school district, with Chicago the highest at $17,872 per teacher compared to Jemez Valley, New Mexico at $4,366 (Carroll, 2007). In the study the school districts were asked to report time and money spent on staff activities associated with teachers leaving the district. This cost analysis included recruitment, hiring, administrative processing, professional development, and separation.

Presenting a broader picture, the NCTAF pointed out dollars being lost out of school districts’ budgets due specifically to teacher attrition. In 2006 the estimated financial loss was disturbing. Accordingly, New York City lost $115,221,250, Los Angeles lost $94,211,250, Miami lost $47,775,000, Dallas lost $28,892,500 and Memphis lost $21,866,250 (Carroll, 2007).

The NCTAF’s cost formula shows an urban school district loses $8,750 for each teacher who leaves the district. In a communication with Thomas Carroll (personal communication, June 5, 2010), the current president of the NCTAF stated, “It is difficult to arrive at a single cost for urban school districts since costs can vary widely with the size of the district, it is something that we are consistently working on.” If the NCTAF formula is applied at the local level for the Grant Wood Area Education Agency, which lost 80 teachers in the 2004-2005 school year, the individual schools cost combined (46 school districts) for turnover was $700,000.
The total monetary cost of losing new teachers in urban districts was broken down and showed an estimate of $500 being spent per teacher for recruitment purposes. The recruiting concept is defined as travel to job fairs, training student teachers, and responding to inquiries from perspective candidates. The hiring incentives were zero even though in Iowa there are state funding initiatives for school districts, which allow them to pay extra money to new teachers who are in high demand curricular areas or who are of a minority race. The hiring incentive concept is defined as salary supplements, daycare subsidies, payment of moving expenses and housing subsidies. Administrative processing was $2,000 per teacher. The administrative processing concept is defined as corresponding with applicants, setting up interviews and checking references.

In addition, the teacher induction cost was $5,800 per teacher. The teacher induction concept is defined as orientations, mentors, reduced teaching load and related forms of structured induction. Professional development was $100 per teacher with professional development defined as teacher activities, workshops and salaries for substitutes (NCTAF, 2010). It is interesting to note if all the school districts encompassed in the Grant Wood Area Education Agency could reduce their teacher attrition by 30%, the total savings would be over $2,000,000.

Obviously, it would be a rare situation for a school district in a given school year to have no teacher attrition due to the normal loss of teachers to retirement. However, the larger issue in the process of teacher attrition is a managed process versus an unmanaged process, especially when looking at young teacher attrition. Unfortunately, a cycle of
school districts hiring followed by young teachers departing over and over again seems to be becoming the norm (Ingersoll, 2002).

New Teacher Quality and Attrition

In many ways, the concept of new teacher attrition and teacher quality is a dichotomy at completely different ends of a continuum due to the reality that many new teachers leave the profession before the system has evidence that they are good teachers. There is possibly a false presumption that because of the different required classroom experiences set forth in undergraduate colleges of education across the United States student teachers go from learning how to teach to knowing how to teach in a very short period of time. These young teachers are instantly expected to deal with classroom management issues; school district governance and school systematic issues; curricular content expertise; and sociological issues, which include geographical, economic, and cultural differences in comparison to the past experiences of these young teachers.

Ingersoll (2004) concluded that in some ways the profession of teaching is an "easy in/easy out" occupation in comparison to other traditional professions. Teaching has a relatively low entry bar and relatively wide entry gate (Ingersoll, 2000). The direct implication is that almost anyone can get into a college of education and eventually find a job. Once getting that job, the education environment is more difficult than the new teacher may expect, especially in an urban school district, and so they quit.

Proponents of this concept have exclaimed historically little or relatively insignificant regulation with regard to the entry into the teaching profession has existed. Before NCLB, in the year 2000, 37 state departments of education required written tests
of basic skills, 29 states had tests of specific content knowledge and 24 states had written tests for subject-specific pedagogy (Education Week, 2000). The argument against criterion-referenced teacher tests is that the tests are designed to measure a teacher’s knowledge and skills in relation to an established standard, rather than in relation to the performance of other candidates (McCarl, 2010). In addition, there are many skill sets that happen on a daily basis in education that have nothing to do with content knowledge but everything to do with effective and efficient human communication. An interesting approach is now being used by states that specifically have a shortage of teachers. For example, recently in California a more traditional approach was suggested because it was found that teachers who graduate from a traditional university-based program have lower attrition rates than teachers with other, non-traditional, alternative forms of preparation (Harris, Camp, & Adkison, 2003).

Unfortunately, for human resource directors and principals who hire new teachers, the construct of teacher quality is strongly correlated with easily quantifiable teacher attributes, which are primarily connected to the teacher’s education degrees and experience levels. One study found a mere three percentage points of the contribution made by teachers could be attributed to differences such as degree level and experience (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). A focus of the federal legislation of NCLB was to improve teacher skills, but it might be harming the retention of teachers. Research conducted by Darling-Hammond (2003) indicated that teachers are increasingly leaving the profession due to the use of high-stake, standard-based testing associated with “drill and kill” curriculum. The “drill and kill” curriculum disengages the freedom and creativity of
teaching thus killing the passion of teaching for a number of new teachers in the field (Moulthrop et al., 2005).

In 2010, the Boston School District began requiring six of their schools’ faculty, including administrators, to reapply for possible teaching jobs due to on-going low standardized test scores identified by the Massachusetts Department of Education. This coincided with a recommendation from the Superintendent of Schools of Central Falls, Rhode Island asking for the termination of every Central High School teacher in one school. This would result in the termination of 74 teachers and the superintendent recommendation was based on low test scores and low graduation rates, which had been identified by the Rhode Island Department of Education as well as the school district itself (Borg & Davis, 2010). This action even prompted comment from the White House.

The difficulty lies in qualifying, in a true scale of measurement, teacher qualifications based on their students’ achievement because research literature on this topic is contradictory. There has been empirical research supporting Goldhaber’s (2002) argument that teacher quality is the most important schooling variable influencing student achievement. This coincides with previous studies done in the 1990s that found teacher education programs and training to significantly increase student achievement (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Raudenbush, Fotiu, & Cheong, 1999). Similar to Goldhaber’s research, Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (1999) suggested teacher quality accounts for a minimum of 7.5% of the variation in students’ test scores.

This review of research is currently important because it highlights the pressure felt by principals and superintendents to hire teachers who demonstrate the ability to
improve test scores and graduation rates for students. At the same time, many new teachers feel pressured by the added educational systematic stress to show improved student achievement. With this added pressure, especially in the face of the economic realities of the profession, new teachers are tempted by other career opportunities.

For many years, high school math and science teachers have had greater opportunities in professions other than teaching. Teachers with high SAT math scores have had significant wage advantages in non-teaching jobs versus teaching jobs (Stinebrickner, 2001). The research conducted over the past 20 years by various researchers has supported the conclusion that teacher turnover is strongly affected by the teachers’ academic field with specific emphasis in math, science, and special education (Boe et al., 1997; Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991; Rumberger, 1987). In addition, these three curricular areas have had the highest turnover rate compared to all other curricular areas in school districts across the nation as well as in the state of Iowa (American Federation of Teachers, 2007).

**Summary**

The review of research literature does imply a strong correlation with regard to why new teachers leave the teaching field. The research has also indicated that there are many reasons for new teachers to leave the teaching profession. Throughout the literature review, the most frequently cited reason given by new teachers for leaving the teaching profession is a lack of monetary compensation. As Goldhaber and Player (2003) showed, it is very difficult to create a “one salary metric” that is fair and equitable for all teachers, across all school districts, and across all states.
State and local governments were and are not immune from understanding the economics of the teaching profession and in many cases they have tried to increase the salaries of teachers. Iowa was a good example of making strides in teacher pay. Whether through the Iowa General Assembly, the Iowa Department of Education, or the Urban Education Network of Iowa; school leaders have been making attempts to improve the financial realities of teachers.

The second major reason for new teachers attrition is the environmental factors of the education profession. These environmental factors include the different aspects of teaching and the various difficulties for new teachers. Six factors that were commonly cited included (a) administrative support (Melton, 2007), (b) most difficult schools with some of the most difficult students (Ingersoll, 2001), (c) multiple assignments in a single school (Chadwick, 2007), (d) the school characteristics of their students (Hanushek et al., 2004), (e) lack of school resources, and (f) new teacher professional development (Ingersoll, 1999; Johnson & Birkeland, 2002).

The third major reason for new teachers to leave the education profession has developed from the federal passage of NCLB legislation of 2001. NCLB has created a dramatic change in classrooms in school districts across the country (Borg & Davis, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2003). As a result, NCLB has become a systematic teacher stressor due to high stakes testing (Borg & Davis, 2010; Darling-Hammond 2003).

This chapter has contained a review of the long and extensive literature with regard to teacher attrition. This has included some of the factors affecting new teachers' decisions to leave the teaching profession. In no way is it a comprehensive analysis
supporting the rationale behind every single teacher’s decision to leave the profession, for those stories are indeed very individualized and personal.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Six secondary teachers from the Iowa Area 10 Grant Wood Area Education Agency, and specifically the Cedar Rapids Community School District, were the focus of this study. The study was designed to gain an understanding of why new teachers decide to leave the teaching profession. This chapter focuses on the research questions, site selection of the study, participants, and specific methods used to collect the data.

The Purpose of the Study

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used to understand why new high school teachers (grades 9 through 12) have decided to leave the field of education. In addition, the study provided insight into new teachers’ perceptions and experiences with particular interest in why they entered the teaching profession, their undergraduate teacher preparation programs, and their career placements until they determined to leave the education profession. This study also examined informal similarities and differences of a professional work experience between the participants and possibly allowed for new teacher candidates to understand the challenges of teaching.

The Research Question

The basic research question for this study was:

1. What element(s) influence new teachers’ decisions to leave teaching within their first five years?
Site Selection

One specific area was selected for inclusion in this study based on the documented new teacher attrition rate by the Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA). The GWAEA includes five counties in eastern Iowa that contain 46 school districts, including the Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD). The CRCSD is currently the second largest school district in the state of Iowa with 33 schools, and a total enrollment of 16,503 students, making it the largest district in the GWAEA (Cedar Rapids Community Schools, 2010). Due to its size, demographics, and setting, the CRCSD is designated as an urban district.

The Model of the Study

For this study, a semi-structured interview method was used to determine each rationale behind six new teachers’ decisions to leave the teaching profession. This research model coincides with the position that qualitative researchers are responsive to environmental cues and able to interact within the parameters of situations and with participants. The researcher, in an interview setting, has the ability to collect information at multiple levels simultaneously; thus, he is able to perceive situations holistically, able to process data as soon as they become available, provide for immediate feedback, request verification of data; and can explore in more detail unexpected responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The strength of qualitative research is based on the researcher being able to fully describe a situation or happening as an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective, but from the reader's perspective as well. As Lincoln and Guba
(1985) stated, "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (p. 120). Qualitative research explains a situation from a contextually rich, detailed lens, within the participant's experiences thus giving an advantage of providing insightful meaning to the participant's world.

Face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were utilized, giving six previously new teachers the opportunity to share their thoughts, experiences, insight, and advice concerning the challenges of being a new teacher.

With the identified possible participants, an initial rapport interview by telephone was used by the researcher in an effort to gauge a level of acceptance and interest by the participant to be a part of the full study. There is no universal definition of rapport, but some researchers view rapport as "frank and open discussion" (Goudy & Potter, 1975), while other researchers see it as a degree of acceptance and cooperation on the part of the participant to a research study (Blohm, 2007). Initial rapport interviewing is recognized for both structured and semi-structured interviewing protocols (Fowler & Mangione, 1990).

There were a minimum of two interviews conducted per participant. All meeting locations and times were mutually agreed upon by the participant and researcher. Prior to conducting each interview, the participant was required to review and sign the written informed consent form (Appendix E). The initial interview used set questions (Appendix D) with the ability of the participant to elaborate in more detail. Before the second meeting, each participant received a printed document specifically describing
their respective narrative during the initial meeting for their review and inspection. The second interview was scheduled six to seven weeks later, where a reflection of the initial key points could be discussed and additional clarification questions could be asked by the researcher to determine if the participant’s narrative was correct from the participant’s interpretation of events.

A pilot interview was conducted on one additional participant to assist in sharpening the interview questions and reveal issues that may not be included in the initial list of questions. The researcher was in contact with his committee chairman to make sure the questions were being revised appropriately for the real interviews. The pilot interview was transcribed into a narrative as well.

As such, all interviews were audio taped and transcribed into a written text document. The researcher constructed a written narrative for each individual participant about their experiences and what happened to lead them to quit. A week before the second interview was to happen, a written narrative of the first interview was delivered to each participant so they would have time to read their story from the first interview. This transcript was in a narrative story format, interpreted by the researcher. At the second interview, the participants were able to evaluate if the narrative was correct up to that point in time. Qualitative research reports are descriptive, incorporating expressive language and the “presence of voice in the text,” thus the rationale for interviewing the participants (Eisner, 1991, p. 36).

The second interview was a member check related directly to the first interview, providing to each respective participant an opportunity to evaluate what the researcher
represented in their statements, thoughts, and feelings of the written transcript (Morse, 1994). In addition, it was an opportunity of the researcher to ask rich contextual questions related back to the first interview. Finally, the second interview served to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on what possible situations could have been extended to encourage them to stay in the profession and provide recommendations for new teachers entering the teaching profession.

Participants

A one subject pilot interview was conducted with a secondary teacher from the CRCSD who met the criteria of a new teacher that has five years of experience. The new teacher had taught in the CRCSD. This was a practice interview process to assist in the efficiency and effectiveness of interviewing the six participants of the study. In addition, the pilot interview subject was asked to offer perceptions and suggestions and/or recommendations with regard to the interview questions as well as other elements of the interview process.

The initial sample of participants was identified through current building administrators and school employees within the CRCSD. From this information, the researcher initially communicated with each potential participant in order to describe the study, have a short rapport interview and possibly invite them to participate in the study (Appendix E). Six participants were selected for this research. The six participants who accepted the invitation to participate in the interviews were not currently teaching (9-12) when interviewed and had a maximum of five years and a minimum of one year teaching experience in the CRCSD when they left the teaching profession. In addition, the
participants selected had been through an accredited teacher education preparation program from an accredited college or university.

Permission was obtained from the Human Subjects Review Board from the University of Northern Iowa with respect to the interview questions. Once the six interview participants had been selected and had expressed interest in participating, a time and place for each interview was scheduled. The interviews took place in a location that was mutually acceptable by the participants and the researcher.

**Interview Questions**

Semi-structured questions were used as the foundation of the first interview (Appendix D). The majority of the questions were designed to be open-ended in an attempt to have the participant feel comfortable with eliciting their own personal, experiential response. These allowed the interviewer to follow-up with clarifying questions based on the response of the participant. The questions were designed to allow for points of discussion based on criteria, as determined in the review of the research literature, of career areas that may create disappointment for new teachers. The questions served as a catalyst for the participants to identify the reasons for their departure from the profession of education.

It was through these questions and other probing follow-up questions that the core of the discussion was attained from the participants. The interviewer used follow-up questions to the participant responses, such as “What do you mean?” or “Could you explain that by giving a specific story or example?” Others might be, “Tell me when you first began to consider leaving teaching.” and “What led you to that thought? Did it
surprise you?” The intent was to prompt the participants to create a deeper understanding of their answers. There was a total of 45 specific questions that were asked of the participants with a limited amount of secondary questions based on the participants’ answers to each specific question. Emphasis of the secondary questions focused on “What?”, “Why?”, and “When?”

The second interview focused on a selection of five to six reflection questions in an attempt by the researcher to allow the participant to go into greater detail. The second interview was conducted six to seven weeks after the first interview. The participants had the written narrative of the first interview a week before the second interview took place. Research suggests that participant reflection will occur and there can be further explanation to the initial questions (Eisner, 1991).

To help facilitate the write-up of the first interview, each participant was sent a written narrative approximately a week before the second interview took place. This allowed the participant to examine what the researcher interpreted and determined, to see if it was an accurate portrayal of the first interview. Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) concurred by stating:

Because as qualitative researchers we are constantly evolving instruments and because settings and people also are dynamic and diverse, data collection is most productively done in creative ways. Hence, the follow-up interview will be less structured and more of a back and forth discussion between interviewer and participant. (p. 195)

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected were used to explore why new teachers are leaving the teaching profession in Iowa and an attempt to urge school districts and school
administrators to discuss and implement support systems for new teachers. Through the face to face semi-structured interview process, a large amount of data were obtained with respect to new teacher beliefs and perspectives about the individual reasons for leaving the teaching profession, such as specifics on their motives, as well as past and present beliefs of the teaching profession. It was the intent of the researcher to look for participants’ similar convergence, also known as triangulation, based on their individual stories in the execution to draw a just and similar conclusion as to why new teachers are leaving the teaching profession (Eisner, 1991; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In addition, the researcher was in continuous contact with his committee chair for assistance regarding the processing and results of the data.

The data collected from the six teachers was compared through their individual narratives. Narrative inquiry is fundamentally about understanding the way people make meaning of their lives from both a social and personal meaning perspective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative analysis is a strong method in the transfer of knowledge connected by the cognitive issues of memory, be it constructed or perceived by the participant (Bruner, 1990 p. 85). Narrative analysis aims to understand an observable event or act through the meanings that people assign to them (Klein & Myers, 1999).

It was the intent of this study to look for the specific patterns with regard to their answers to the questions as a whole. A similar response that all participants gave to a specific question served as a strong indicator for determining cause depending on the specific question asked. In addition, member check was used to provide participants the
opportunity to evaluate the adequacy of data and the initial results as well as to confirm particular aspects of the data (Morse, 1994).

**Trustworthiness**

Participants were assured complete confidentiality in the final reporting of all research findings. Pseudonyms for the participants were used in an effort to ensure anonymity and their specific place of past employment in the CRCSD was not mentioned. After the total completion of the dissertation process, the interview audio tapes and transcripts will be destroyed. A narrative analysis was used to create a story of the participants' teaching experiences used to collect extensive data with the intent to organize details, categorize data, identify possible patterns, develop themes, and synthesize events of each case (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In addition, the data were used to develop possible individual school initiative programs through school district and area education agency involvement.

**Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited to only six high school teachers who had taught in the Grant Wood Area Education Agency and specific to the Cedar Rapids Community School District. This study does not generalize for all teachers that resigned from the teaching profession, but served to study these six participants in a very deep and rich analysis to understand their viewpoints of the profession (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants in this study had a maximum of five years and a minimum of one year teaching experience before they decided to end their teaching career.
An additional limitation was due to a natural rain and flooding phenomenon that had the City of Cedar Rapids as well as the central office of the Cedar Rapids Community School District underwater during the tragic flood of Iowa in 2008. With this stated all personnel records were ruined by the flood waters in the central office of the Cedar Rapids Community School District since at that time all personnel records were located on the first floor and at that time no significant back-up system existed for those records (Figure 4 and 5).

Conclusion

The intent of this chapter was to describe the qualitative research methodology utilized in this study. The qualitative research methodology focused on narrative inquiry based on the goal of this research project, which is to identify the factors and/or reasons that new teachers leave the teaching profession because of their experience in an Iowa urban high school setting. Through this knowledge, secondary school leaders can develop and possibly institute methods and programs to assist quality new teachers to remain and excel in the teaching profession.
CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The intent of this chapter is to present the research data gathered during interviews with six teachers who have taught secondary education for one through five years in the Cedar Rapids, Iowa Community School District. The data collected was through qualitative interview techniques for the purpose of gaining an understanding of the experiences that these new teachers experienced and why they chose to end their teaching careers in five years or less. The significance of these narratives is to identify specific reasons why these new teachers decided to leave education in an Iowa urban school district and more fully understand the specific changes they experienced.

Bob's Story: Teaching is a Tough Job

Bob and I meet at a prearranged location that was well-suited for him based on his proximity of his current work site. It was a local Applebee’s restaurant. Bob was all smiles and we shook hands as I introduced myself. We sat in a quiet booth in the back corner, away from everyone. Bob had just finished working a 10-hour day in the construction business, more specifically, forming concrete. He had his jeans, t-shirt, and work boots on that were the same clothes that he wore at the job sight. We sat down and started to get to know each other as to what Bob was doing in his life. Bob grew up in Cedar Rapids with a younger sister and two parents.

He described himself as a normal, middle class kid who enjoyed school and sports. School was not always easy for him, but most of the classes were not too difficult, especially classes that he had a natural interest in, such as history. As we began
to talk, Bob had a smile on his face, a very pleasant communication style as he looked directly at me. He had a short black hair cut, almost a crew cut. In my mind, I imagined he still looked much like the athlete that he was from his high school and college days. Bob was an above average high school student and a very good athlete; both of these characteristics would allow him to go to an Iowa university where he would develop his academic and athletic skills.

Bob later transferred to a small liberal arts college in Iowa because of a football injury and the knowledge that his playing time would be extremely limited. He chose to finish his secondary social studies education degree and graduated in 2006. I asked Bob what was the driving force in his entering the education profession? His answer was to the point, "I wanted to give back to young people and hopefully give them what was given to me throughout my schooling." After graduating in December of 2006 Bob immediately entered the education labor force of the greater Cedar Rapids area where he substitute taught in various school districts, such as Cedar Rapids, Marion, Linn-Mar, and College Community. Bob explained that this was actually very interesting because he was able to see the differences between the schools and the districts and could more easily compare and contrast the buildings and the students.

Social studies jobs were difficult to get in Cedar Rapids at the time, especially in the middle of a school year. Bob stated, "After substitute teaching for half-a-year most administrators knew me because I was in their buildings, so I started to get summer interviews for the coming school year." Bob interviewed for one position at a Cedar Rapids high school and did not get that position. The individual who did get the job was
more qualified, with more experience, based on what other teachers in the building told Bob.

Then a Cedar Rapids middle school position opened up a week later, and I interviewed for that position. In the time between that interview and the answer to whether I was selected for the position, the assistant principal from the high school I originally interviewed at called and offered me a position, not in social studies, but in a program I never heard of called IJAG. I was briefed on the position and I made a decision; I better take the high school job because there is no guarantee that I will get the middle school position. That's how I got my first career job in the Cedar Rapids School District.

Bob quickly learned about IJAG; for one, what the acronym meant. IJAG stands for Iowa Jobs for America's Graduates. The program is for at-risk students, specifically, those with attendance issues, poor home life, a drug problem, pregnant students, and/or students who are orphaned. Bob stated, “All of those things that are at-risk criteria, they were in my class. I had about 45 students on my roster, three classes of 15 kids each, and our job was basic, make sure they graduated. The majority of the kids were ninth and tenth graders.”

It was actually a team concept because at the high school I taught at, I was with the younger students and I had a co-teacher that taught the eleventh and twelfth graders. The plan was to have me for two years and then the students would have the other teacher. As I think about it, the program was very similar to special education, but not from an education standpoint, meaning like a reading disability, but more due to social disabilities.

As we talked about the challenges of IJAG, Bob came back to his student teaching days where he student taught at a smaller high school. In Cedar Rapids his high school was about 1400 students; in the smaller student teaching experience his high school was about 400 students in a small town in Northeast Iowa. He remembered a conversation that he had with his supervising teacher, Mr. Pelling, who only had about
two years before he was going to retire. He and Mr. Pelling were talking about what had changed in Mr. Pelling’s professional life of over 34 years of teaching. According to Bob, Mr. Pelling stated that originally when he got into this profession, if there was a student issue in his class, be it a student not achieving academically, a behavior problem, or just a student having some issues that were not school related, he would call home and talk with the parents to try and solve the problem together. Now, he calls home and the parents want to know what he did to mess the kid up.

Bob then related the story Mr. Pelling had shared with him to what he went through at his high school with his IJAG students. He stated he was going through similar issues; however, it was not at the end of his career, but rather was at the beginning. Bob explained,

As I started into my third year, which is actually the year I got out of education, Mr. Pelling’s words kept coming up more and more in my mind throughout the days that followed. I saw a lot of teachers dealing with more and more behavior problems and less and less curriculum learning issues.

I asked Bob if his student teaching time prepared him for the challenges that he faced at his high school in Cedar Rapids. He stated,

I thought my student teaching experience was excellent. I really enjoyed my middle school placement. My supervising teacher there was Mrs. Tagg. She was actually an elementary teacher so she had a different approach than some of the other middle school teachers in the building. Her class was eighth grade American History. The kids were so much fun, every day they got excited. You know how some high school kids come into the classroom with a chip on their shoulder? Middle schoolers still have a bit of kid in them and are excited to learn. We reenacted the Boston massacre in class, debated the Articles of Confederation, rewrote the Constitution; the kids had a lot of fun, and I think I had more fun watching them learn and grow then they did with the curriculum. You could see it almost every day.
I asked, "See it, what is it?" Bob looked at me and said, "You know - it. It is when the students get into the subject and develop, it is that magic time as a teacher that you see kids learn and the reason you became a teacher."

I asked him about his high school placement. Bob said it was excellent. He stated,

I really enjoyed Mr. Pelling and the perspective he had on schools, education, and the students. He knew his history and kids responded to him. Not like Mrs. Tagg, obviously they had different styles with different levels of students, but both were excellent. I learned an enormous amount from both of them.

We shifted back to his high school position when I asked, "Can you describe what the school culture was like?" Bob responded,

When I was first hired, I was pumped. I had my first career job, making decent money, my own room. I worked in a high school that won national awards for their academic excellence; they had an excellent history of athletics and a good fine arts program. This high school had it all going in the right direction and I was a part of it. How could you not be excited? The culture of the school was a feeling of success. You could see it in the trophy cases by the amount of success they had in all curricular and co-curricular activities.

This Cedar Rapids high school was built in 1957 and remodeled regularly since then. It has a reputation for having a very high academic achieving student body with some very high socio-economic families and students. At the same time, there is a large group of families and students that are in the low socio-economic group. The minority population is large, about 25%, making it the most diverse high school in Cedar Rapids. Parent involvement in the high school is very good among all social-economic groups. The Parent-Teacher Association and the Athletic Booster Club are excellent. Bob expounded upon this school, stating, "We were told in our staff meetings that we have
success in many areas and we are to be achievement oriented, and we have support in many different ways to help in being successful.”

While Bob was at this high school they won a 4A state track championship, their swimming program won a conference championship, the debate program was the top 5 in the state, they were a top 100 AP school in the nation. He stated, “It was no secret; the administration would tell us, we were here last year and we want to be here this year. They were very, very driven for success in school programs.”

I asked him about his viewpoints on the principal and administrative team of the building. Bob responded,

For me the principal was pretty good, actually for me he was very good. The administration was good as far as not coming to me and complaining about teaching style and methods. As far as actually addressing the kids’ discipline problems, well that was a different story. Some things would happen in my class or other teacher’s classes that I heard directly about and the kid would be sitting in my class the next day. I would be thinking does this kid feel like he has accountability for anything? The one thing that really bothered me was kids seemed to believe they had a right to have a cell phone and to use a cell phone in class. Dr. Palmer and the administrative staff would not address it. At the time, I thought it was easy, just tell students that they can’t have cell phones, as I look back on it now, it is a huge problem to solve.

Bob felt he was superficially supported by the administration on day-to-day issues. Bob stated,

We had rules until they were broken. Kids would come into my class five, ten minutes late and the administration did nothing. I just didn’t feel there was a lot of support for dealing with this one basic problem. Other small problems would come up and between these things and the attendance issue, nothing happened to the students.

Bob put his head down and had a reflective pause for a second and then stated,
It was a great place to work as a teacher, if you didn’t want God breathing down your neck and you wanted to be allowed to teach your own style; in that case it was an excellent place to teach, at least for me.

I asked him what he meant in terms of the concept of, “at least for me.” He responded,

I didn’t like what I saw other teachers have to deal with, it was ridiculous. We were customer service in our approach; that was kind of a coined term from our principal. He believed that we should be very customer friendly. We are there for our students; it was almost to the point of being too much.

I asked him if he could give an example of this Bob said,

“No problem, I remember like it was yesterday that a colleague came to me and had just finished a conversation with the principal. She was visually upset. She told me she had some of her students go to the principal and complain about the curriculum and specifically one assignment. This was the same curriculum she had been teaching the last ten years, but had watered it down five years ago. The principal asked her if she could adjust the assignment to make it more student-friendly. She said, ‘this is the least I have ever taught, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to lower my standards and keep our students happy?’

Bob explained in his own words,

After that situation I somewhat decided I didn’t want to be a part of that. Maybe it was my own upbringing or my sports upbringing that said this was just wrong. Education is one of the most important jobs there is and for me I’m not happy just getting by.

But throughout our discussions, Bob would not always be critical of the principal; in many statements he would be extremely positive about the principal. He said multiple times,

The principal was always very, very good at recognizing what people were doing and sincerely identifying teachers, coaches and directors who were having students achieve in their programs. He made sure if a staff member was doing anything out of the way or part of a program then that staff member was publicly mentioned. He actually is one of the best leaders I have associated with at finding people doing things right. This principal understands very well that people are what make a building, so he was very good at managing people, students, and faculty alike.
As Bob worked through his three years as a high school teacher, the students that came in and out of his classroom on a daily basis were very much the same. Every student needed a lot of guidance and assistance in school and out in society. Some days Bob would make the connection and some days he would not. Despite all the success that Bob’s high school was showing publically, there was a group of students there who were not doing nearly as well.

The lack of success was not for a lack of facilities. Bob had his own office with a phone and computer, next to the administrators’ offices and a separate carpeted classroom that had cushion-comfortable chairs that could tilt at the whim of a student’s desire, plus a computer, phone, and smart board. The square footage of the classroom was oversized for the 15 students that Bob had per class. The classroom was air-conditioned for the hot days in early fall and early summer, and an excellent heat system for those cold Iowa winter days.

In addition to administrative support there were some aspects that frustrated Bob throughout his high school teaching career. One frustration was the lack of parent involvement, which was limited at best. Bob commented, “On parent teacher conference days, Advanced Placement teachers who taught college bound students would have parents standing and waiting outside of their doors to talk to them, while I might have one parent show up, total, for all the conference days.”

A third area of frustration was the amount of paperwork. For every school day, for every student, Bob was documenting what he did in class in a report form for each student. It was part of the record keeping that was mandated by the state of Iowa. Bob
even had students that were on Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and had to assist with those plans.

The fourth area of frustration was the discipline side of being a teacher. It was constant, normally not serious, but constantly being challenged. Bob told a story about one of the worst days he had as a teacher:

It was in my third year; it was a long day and a tenth grade girl came into my class and was stating something that was totally untrue and just not very important. She was being ridiculous. She began to tick me off in class because she wouldn’t stop. I verbally laid into her and let her have it. I didn’t handle it to well. What is worse is [that] I let my level of professionalism down, but I also let her down a little by how I acted. I didn’t act like a professional educator. Frankly I didn’t act like a good person. That is the one image I will remember the rest of my life as far as losing control.

Despite the frustrations, there were just as many accomplishments, which Bob felt good about, particularly in terms of what his students learned. Bob stated:

There are kids that I am just so proud of; I see them out and about in our community and they are doing relatively fine. Perfect? No. Better than what they were? Yes. I remember my last year; we were at a leadership development conference and on the last day, there was a dinner for staff and students that were present. Earlier in the term, we had worked on social manners and etiquette. The students were great, they were fun, they were well behaved, well-mannered, [and] the students were actually having real conversations between adults and students. It was an awesome evening.

Bob shifted in his seat, and there was a pause and then he said:

There are kids that I’m just so proud of and then there were kids that, well, could have really done something with themselves. I had a couple of girls in my last year that were two of the smartest girls. They could have gotten straight A’s if they wanted. And there were times when they wanted to and they damn near did, but it was just their attitude and things, and some of those things were really hard to swallow. They were this close to getting away from failure, but they didn’t make it. They both got moved to the alternative school. Maybe they figured it out. I hope they did.
I asked Bob to explain why this was so hard for him, because sitting there, it was obvious through his eyes looking away that it was difficult for Bob to talk about. He replied,

I’ve never been a person who has made a lot of excuses, yet I dealt with people every day who made excuses all the time. I got better at bridging the kids with my expectations, but as I got better throughout my three years, I just enjoyed teaching less and less. Teaching got tougher and tougher with kids that came in with every excuse in the book.

I asked, “Tougher than pouring cement?” He replied:

Are you kidding? A lot tougher. I never have been at a job site where someone said they couldn’t do something and then just shut down for the day. Maybe we couldn’t control something about a situation such as rain clouds coming in on the day of a pour, but we solved the issue. Education is tough!”

I noted, “My brother works in the construction business and not everyone he comes across is a problem solver, do you agree with that?” Bob commented:

Yeah, I understand what you are saying. But, the other guys on the crew don’t overtly stop working. That is one thing the kids in IJAG probably taught me; that is, I have a hard time being around people that say, ‘I can’t.’

I asked if the principal would have said to him, “Bob, we have a social studies position for you next year,” would he have taken it? Bob in almost a milli-second after I asked the question shot back and said, “If the principal said that I would probably still be in teaching.” Bob continued:

That is a different deal and a different program in social studies. That is what I was trained to do. IJAG was a different program and because of that, it made it easier for me to get out and try something different. In my mind I wanted to change when I was younger so I wouldn’t be thinking 10 to 25 years down the road, maybe I should have....

I then asked, “Speaking of pouring cement, you get paid pretty well compared to teaching?” Bob replied,
Yes, but I work a ton of hours during the construction season. Normally, six days a week, sometimes seven. Actually, it isn’t much different then teaching and coaching, just the calendar year is flipped because of the Iowa winters. When it gets to cold, we normally don’t pour cement.

I followed with, “Did anyone in your undergraduate education program ever talk to you about teacher pay?” Bob stated:

No, not really. I had an idea because of one of my supervising teachers talked to me about it during student teaching. It wasn’t like he showed me his check or anything like that. He didn’t complain, he just said to make any real money in this business you have to get a masters degree.

I asked if his pay was acceptable as a teacher. Bob responded,

Originally, yes. But as time went on and there were more discipline issues, and more paper work, and long days between the classroom and coaching, I started to see I could make more money doing something else based on the time commitment I gave to the high school.

Bob emphasized that he enjoyed teaching and making a difference in students’ lives, but felt as if he was giving a lot to his school and that eventually, the return was not worth the investment.

**Eric’s Story: Administrative Support is Key**

Eric is now in his early 30’s and works for a Fortune 500 agri-business headquartered in Iowa. He grew up in Northeast Iowa, in a moderate size town in relation to other cities in Iowa. His hometown when he was growing up had a population of about 6,000 people. All of his public education schooling was in the same school district, where he also graduated from high school. Eric’s father was a teacher at a neighboring school district, actually smaller than where Eric went to school. After high school, Eric went on to earn his education degree and an industrial technology degree at a regents school in the state of Iowa.
After contacting Eric and explaining why I would like to listen to his story about teaching, we agreed to meet at a local restaurant close to where he, his wife, and two children now live. I got there early, asked the host for a remote corner booth, and got comfortable. Eric approached about five minutes later and identified himself and we sat down exchanging pleasantries. He was a good sized man, roughly six foot in height, sandy blonde hair, and an athletic build, with a very welcoming voice. He was dressed in jeans and a blue sport shirt. After we ordered breakfast, we began to talk about Eric’s educational experiences in college and his first job after graduating from college.

He described the different events in the education department at this university, such as doing different practicums, classwork regarding student management issues, a class on classroom technology such as computer grading systems, and his student teaching experiences. There was definitely pride in his voice for the university that he attended and the college of education. He talked about how even now, he goes back to watch his alma mater compete in basketball and football games.

College was not that hard for Eric, because he had an understanding of what the teaching profession was like from his father being a teacher. Eric commented, “What I envisioned teaching to be from watching my father and as a practicum student matched up, but other experiences in college classrooms were much different from my first teaching job.”
Eric went on to describe some of the professors he had in a classroom setting at his university. Eric commented:

I wish my professors would have had more real world type situations for us. Like scenarios being thrown out at you rather than talking about the theory of education back during Socrates timeframe. I wish I would have had a professor discuss the fact that this is so-and-so is going to happen to you and what will you do? I had all these doctors of education but they didn’t teach in public education for over 15 or 20 years.

Eric’s first teaching job was in a smaller rural community located about 20 miles from Cedar Rapids. Eventually, he would change schools and would end his teaching career in the Cedar Rapids Community School District. Eric talked about the excitement that he felt when he was told this smaller school district wanted to hire him in Eastern Iowa.

Eric commented, “Boy was I excited! After I got called by the principal and he offered me the job and I accepted, I called my father right away to tell him the good news.”

I asked him to describe his work environment.

It was a centralized campus for middle school and high school and these two schools were physically connected. My assignment was to teach industrial technology for seventh through twelfth grade students. The ages of the kids were separated by different wings, but all the students were under the same roof of one large building.

I asked, “What was your day like there?” He responded:

We had block scheduling, which was different from my college student teaching experience. Block scheduling wasn’t bad, I just wasn’t used to it. Actually, looking back at my two different teaching experiences, I enjoyed block scheduling more since the students really received a lot of concentrated time to work on projects.

I then asked about the class size, to which he responded:

The class size wasn’t too bad, considering the school district was a rural school district. I had some classes with 20 plus students and some classes I had with only 12 to 15 kids. It just depended on what class was being taught and what
level of students. Normally, my classes with older students, there was not as many students....You know the class size really wasn’t an issue. What was an issue for me was, since this was a rural district, I would have classes where in the same class there would be three kids named Johnson or Schultz. I would ask if they were cousins or brothers and they would say, ‘No, we’re not related.’ I walked away and ask myself how they couldn’t be related when they all looked very similar in physical features, it actually was amusing.

I inquired about how the other faculty members treated him as a new teacher.

Eric’s initial statement was, “Really well.” Then he leaned back in the booth and said, “Most of the faculty members treated me well. I worked with another industrial tech teacher who was there for 20 years. He was awesome. We got along well. He was my real mentor.” I then asked, “You said most. Were there some faculty members that did not treat you well?” Eric replied:

I wouldn’t say bad, just not how I would describe good. I was assigned a mentor and turns out this guy was a counselor. At the time and even now, he did a pretty awful job of mentoring. At the time, those mentors had to be certified through the state. He had his mentor certification, where he would get $2000.00 or something like that to mentor me. He never came down to my room, he didn’t do anything. He barely talked to me in a semester. The other industrial technology teacher is the one that really helped me on a daily basis.

I further questioned, “As you got into the school year, were there any problems that started to happen?” Eric responded:

There were a couple of issues. One situation, where there were a handful of kids that were causing problems in wood class. Everyone knows this is a dangerous environment due to all the power tools. So, I wrote three of them up and sent it down to the principal responsible for discipline, who just happened to be the football coach. The worst kid, who was the most insubordinate consistently, the principal did nothing to, but the other two he gave detention. It just happened the insubordinate kid was also a football player and basically the principal didn’t want to do anything to him for fear of losing a game.

This incident happened in his second year and was the turning point for Eric. He started applying to different school districts and was hired for an Industrial Technology teaching
position at a high school in the Cedar Rapids Community School District. This high school was a better fit for Eric based on variety of industrial technology programs for students. While the smaller rural high school was adequately supplied, the Cedar Rapids high school had almost anything an industrial technology teacher would want in terms of programs. There was an adequate amount of computers, computer aided drafting (CAD) machines, a large wood shop, a robotics lab, even an automotive shop.

But, the big difference was the comparison between the teaching environment in his old (rural) high school and his new Cedar Rapids high school. Eric reminisced about the Cedar Rapids high school as having poor lighting in the hallway and in some of the classrooms. The computer lab was extremely hot, compared to his old high school, which had air conditioning. There was no air conditioning in his Cedar Rapids classrooms.

Eric moved to Cedar Rapids with his new bride and felt he was ready for a large urban high school environment. He was hired in mid-summer to come on board and at the first faculty meeting was a little in awe of the amount of people on staff at this high school; there were about 150 adults in the cafeteria, which was where the staff meetings were normally held. It was much bigger than his previous teaching experience. The first day of teacher in-service meetings, Eric made friends with a social studies teacher named Scott. They both had a mutual interest in the Chicago White Sox baseball team and Scott had his classroom right next to the industrial technology wing.

Eric became aware of the significant differences between a rural high school and an Iowa urban high school located in Cedar Rapids. Eric described a more “rough”
environment in his new high school in relation to the laid-back, easy does it attitude common in his first high school. At the Cedar Rapids high school, there was a diverse student body compared to the rural high school experience. Eric commented:

There were probably on average of 25 students in my classes, 25 students in pretty much every class when I first got there. Out of the 25 kids, I don’t want to say they had mental issues, but there were a lot of kids that you needed to probably have a one-on-one adult para-professional [for]. I had one class that only had 20 kids, but 18 of them were designated as special education students. In that situation, I would walk around doing simple concepts of how to read a ruler, finding out that most of them had no clue and it wasn’t going to get any better. I would spend days on how to get them to convert a fraction or define an angle and they just were not going to be able to do it.

Eric was openly uncomfortable with special needs students, because the undergraduate teacher education program that he went through never even mentioned the concept of a para-professional or teacher associate, let alone how to direct another adult working in unison with the teacher and the student. Eric commented:

In my second year in Cedar Rapids, I remember this girl; it was the first couple of days of classes and these kids are coming in and I was taking attendance and I had this girl on my attendance list. She wasn’t there on the first day, nor the second day, nor the third day, and so I finally asked the students who were present, ‘Hey do you know where Ashley is? Is she going to school here this year?’ Then some of the students commented, ‘Yes, she goes to school here.’ On the fourth day she shows up with a teacher aide, and she is a severe and profound student in a wheelchair. No one ever told me from the counseling department to the administration. So, I’m thinking, “What the hell am I going to do?” I had no accommodations set up for her. Even if I did have accommodations, I don’t know if she could have used any equipment. Matter of fact, I know she couldn’t use any equipment. One of the first days that she was in attendance, I’m up at the dry erase board writing something and she just lets out this big scream and I just about defecated in my pants right there in class.

Eric laughed out loud, more at how he reacted to the situation then to the student. He finished the story with, “I gave her an S for the class. It wasn’t her fault.”
Eric said that he changed from his rural high school experience to his urban high school experience based on expectations of students. He commented:

Maybe because it was my first job and I was coming right out of college and I had certain teacher-student expectations. Looking back on it, I wasn’t very flexible in my first job. When I went to Cedar Rapids I became more tolerant, some of that was the students, and really I think some of that was me; in most cases I was much more confident in my abilities.

As Eric talked through his change as a teacher, there was also a change in his voice, to more of a serious, reflective side. He volunteered a story that obviously he had thought a lot about from his Cedar Rapids days of teaching. Eric said:

But then there was this one student, she was in my Introduction to Technology class. Normally, I can find good in almost everyone I meet, but this girl, there was a lot more bad showing on a daily basis than good. She was never on task which created a classroom management issue for me and the other students, she never turned any assignments in on time or late for that matter. I offered daily to help her get caught up if she came before or after school. She never showed up but I would see her in the hallway just hanging out with her friends. Finally, I had enough, I took her down to the office and said, ‘I am not having this student continue in my class.’

The assistant principal in charge of disciple listened and then told me I could not drop her from my class because the student would have no place else to go this late into the term. Eric grinned and sarcastically stated, “And so the wild child finished the term in my class. I really appreciated that administrative support.”

Eric said he felt that he contributed to student development and to the school while he was in Cedar Rapids. “I coached ninth grade baseball and helped with events for other sports. Plus, I had a bunch of kids coming in to work on the computers in Industrial Technology, before and after school.” Not surprisingly Eric talked about how much time he was at the high school.
I was there a lot, I mean a lot. At that time, I was newly married and my wife was working her job where she didn’t get home until 7 o’clock at night. I really had nothing to go home for; I was a young guy living in Cedar Rapids. We didn’t even have a dog. I’d get to school a little after 7 and stay until 6 at night working through lesson plans and working on stuff in the shop.”

Eric talked about how he was not the only one working into the evening, there were a lot of dedicated teachers at that Cedar Rapids high school. He would take a break now and then from his classroom in the evening and walk down to the teachers’ lounge for a soda. From the industrial technology wing to the teacher’s lounge was about 150 yards, filled with classrooms and various offices. Eric was always amazed how many teachers and students were still around. Even coaches who just finished their practices were back in their classrooms, trying to stay ahead of their classroom obligations. Eric noted:

Maybe it was because of my Dad that I wasn’t shocked that teachers worked hard, I knew he put in a lot of time. You could tell he loved it! In Cedar Rapids, I saw teachers working daily in the evening, and even on the weekends they would come in to work on their lesson plans or to correct assignments.

Eric laughed and said. “And I thought I was the only one without a life.”

Eric would explain that he really felt supported in Cedar Rapids, not that he lacked support in his rural high school, but the Cedar Rapids community showed more appreciation when they saw teachers in public from his experiences. Eric commented:

You’d be at a restaurant and see a student with their family and they would bring their family over to talk to you. Normally it wasn’t about the student’s personal classwork; it was something to do with the class curriculum, such as he is my Industrial Technology teacher. Or they would say he is the teacher for the class where we do some cool stuff on the laser or where we make key chains. Or he is my baseball coach.
Eric reflected on his feelings of being appreciated by students. How that really made him want to do his best for his students and players. Cedar Rapids was an interesting city for Eric because he did not grow up there and it was a large city in relation to what he was accustomed. Cedar Rapids has over 115,000 citizens, while Eric’s home town had about 6,000 citizens. Eric felt that Cedar Rapids was almost like two or three little cities in one. People traveled back and forth but most of the kids stayed on the side of town they went to school. They ate at the restaurants on their side of town, their families bought groceries at their local neighborhood grocery store. There was a lot of high school territorialism from an education standpoint in Cedar Rapids. We had certain programs at my high school that the other high schools did not have while the other high schools had academic programs that my high school did not have and the principals of all the high schools “sold” that fact to their parents and students. Eric and his wife would see the kids out and about at the different places, but he noticed that many of his high school faculty members did not live in the area of where they taught. Eric commented:

In my first rural high school setting, you would live two blocks away from another faculty member or administrator. While in Cedar Rapids the high school faculty members I taught with would live in Walford (small suburb city about 12 miles outside of Cedar Rapids) or across the city, or even in Iowa City (23 miles from Cedar Rapids). We weren’t as tight in Cedar Rapids as the faculty in the rural high school. Come to think of it, my wife and myself lived in Cedar Rapids my first year and then moved to Atkins (5 miles outside of Cedar Rapids) my second year there.

Eric talked about the huge adjustment he had from going to a small town school district, to a large university setting, back to teaching in a small high school setting, then going to a large urban Iowa high school. It was his perception that the administrators in
the small high school setting he taught at did not really worry about racial/ethical
differences, mainly because there really were no differences among the student body or
faculty for that matter. However, when Eric came to Cedar Rapids, that changed; race
did become a reality at least for him. He felt that the administration in Cedar Rapids
would bend over backwards to make sure something was not misinterpreted as a racial
situation. Eric stated:

There was not a direct discussion in the faculty meetings about racial issues, but
there was this feeling I had after watching things unfold that the administration
would be extremely sensitive when a black kid was in trouble. It felt to me that
black students were given more opportunities or more chances than maybe the
rest of the student body. Not always from a discipline standpoint, sometimes just
through a program standpoint such as the Black awareness program in February
but there was not a Hispanic awareness program.

As Eric began to reflect more on the administration of his high school in Cedar
Rapids, he remembered a huge concern with the lack of administrative observation of his
teaching. When Eric started his new teacher orientation, the human resource department
explained the evaluation model and paperwork that would parallel the process. Eric was
familiar with most of the information, as his rural school district did many of the same
things regarding teacher evaluations. The human resource director talked about what the
building administration will do when a new teacher begins at their specific school
assignment.

When the start of the year in-service meetings began at his new high school the
building administration did have a meeting for two groups of teachers that were in the
building, new employees to the Cedar Rapids Community School District and veteran
teachers. Because he was a new employee, Eric attended that meeting where the building
assistant principal went over all the documentation of the evaluation and the timeline for which certain things were expected to be completed. Eric commented:

It was very organized, a lot better than my rural high school. That is until the students arrived, then what was said and what was done were complete opposites. The assistant principal in charge of my observation kept setting up meeting times to come observe and meet and he would never show up. He never ever showed up. I was never observed in three years, nor did I ever sign my evaluation. As far as I was concerned, I was never evaluated.

As Eric began to ask around to other colleagues, he was getting the same answer; other teachers were not being evaluated either. Eric commented:

Mark, who was another new industrial arts teacher never was evaluated. Someone eventually figured out this assistant principal was not doing his job and instead of terminating him, they moved him to a different building. The interesting thing is [that] I could maybe understand if he was in his last year of education but this guy was in his early 30s and still had a lot more years to do his job.

Eric looked out the window and after a long pause, said:

That is why the public looks down on education, because when people really are not doing their job, they just get moved, not released. If that assistant principal was in my business right now, he would have been terminated in three months.

Eric then brought up that not all the administration was poorly qualified at his Cedar Rapids high school. The principal in Cedar Rapids really tried to develop his staff compared to his previous experience with his building principal at his rural high school.

Eric talked about the differences between the two high schools:

Staff development at my rural high school was normally led by Grant Wood Area Education Agency people that just drove teachers insane with the way they would talk down to us. Then when I began at the Cedar Rapids high school it was all in house. We never had staff development by AEA, it was all teacher lead or principal lead. We almost always talked about something I could use in my own classroom from a teaching methodology standpoint or a class management tool. It was really good.
Further challenges in the classroom and in the school weighed on Eric, but the incident that was the trigger event of deciding to leave the profession was an incident that happened in his third and final year in Cedar Rapids. He explained:

I am dealing with industrial technology issues everyday regarding instruction. I have five preps and constantly the computers are going out, so the students cannot use them during class time. In Cedar Rapids, they would not give the teachers administrative rights to fix our computers. Someone from tech support would have to come out to our school and depending on what day and what other problems other schools were having the tech support individual might be out for two or three days.

Eric was a proactive person so he would go down to the department head, who was very proactive as well, and get him involved with tech support. It got to the point that this was happening weekly and both Eric and the department head were focused on fixing the computers instead of teaching their classes. It was vital, especially in the curricular area entitled Project Lead the Way (PLTW), which is a state initiative to get students more interested in becoming engineers. Students can even get college credit at the end of specific classes if they past the final test. Eric continued

So I would spend, I don’t know how many hours, working on trying to get this software to work. I have been trained and certified to use the software and know the program inside and out, and it would not work. As you sit there and trouble-shoot for hours and hours then some tech guys walk in and fix it because they have administrative rights and you do not, well it is an extremely frustrating experience.

The equipment that Eric had in his room was some of the best equipment that any industrial technology program in the nation had in their classrooms. Eric stated, “Cedar Rapids was awesome for getting the equipment, it was the support for the equipment that was lacking, the bureaucracy was daunting.”
Eric and the department head had a meeting at the superintendent’s office with the district head of technology. They were sitting around a big table and the Director of Technology backed the policy of administrative rights versus teacher rights on computers and finally, as Eric noted, he said, “Fine, we’ll give you the rights but if your laptop breaks down we’re not going to come out and fix it. Eric stated,

That was the last straw, which is the time that I consciously said I am done with education. It was the most frustrating day. It was the most frustrating day I have ever had before or since in my professional career. I was HOT when I left that room!

Three months later Eric left Cedar Rapids and education as a profession. Eric commented:

They weren’t all bad days, matter of fact the kids were normally great, the faculty members I socialized [with] were great. I still see some of them for different social events, some of the higher ups literally just got in our way of doing our job due to some policy or procedure. The building administration could not solve the issues and the large bureaucracy seemed to be incapable of understanding my frustration.

Eric remembered his construction class and how proud he was of them for building a storage shed that they sold to a member of the community. He described how proud his students were when the purchaser of the shed came and picked it up at school. All the students helped him put it on the trailer and fasten it down. Eric stated:

We were standing out in the parking lot when the truck and trailer drove off with the shed and in front of all the class this one student says, ‘we built that.’ In my mind, when I reminisce about my time in education that is what I think about…, those were the best days.

Justin’s Story: The Financial Reality

Justin is a smaller man, standing about 5’5” height and 165 pounds. Justin has a personality that is very likeable right at the start of a relationship. When asked about that
part of himself Justin made a comment, “That part of me probably developed from living in a small Iowa town where people are just friendly and likeable.” Justin grew up in a small town in northwest Iowa, where everyone knew each other and friendships developed from the onset of going to elementary through high school. Justin stays in contact with many of his past high school friends today through social media. During his senior year in high school, he was looking at different career choices and the one thing that he really liked was architecture. His grades were excellent, which was one reason the Iowa university that he was looking at was actually a legitimate choice for him. He had other friends that looked at architecture but were told that they would not be admitted to the pre-architecture program at this Iowa university because of their lower grades.

Both of his parents were very supportive of education and of Justin applying himself in school. Justin admitted that originally the value of education came from his mother who was an elementary teacher. His father worked in the construction business and was not home very much, especially when the summer work schedule became intense. But that was alright with Justin because his father would take him to job sites where he learned the construction trade through real life experiences.

As happens many times in life, Justin had to make a college decision between two schools, one university in Iowa or one college in Nebraska. He liked architecture and the academic program at the Iowa university but he also wanted to continue playing sports, which was a viable option if he went to college in Nebraska. The problem with the Nebraska college is that they did not have a major in architecture, but did have industrial technology and construction management as possible majors. Justin chose the small
college atmosphere in Nebraska where he could study industrial technology and continue to play collegiate sports.

While he was there, Justin had an academic advisor talk to him about teaching as a possible major that could go along with his industrial technology degree with the intent of making Justin more career options. Justin thought about it for a while, understanding how hard his mother worked but also how satisfied she was working with young students at the elementary school. He decided to double major, one being education and the other being industrial technology. During Justin’s first college football season, he suffered a career ending injury.

With his college athletic career over, he became more involved in the activities that were provided at his college. He became a resident assistant for one of the college’s dorm facilities, became president of the industrial technology club, and was also active in the student senate. After experiencing the undergraduate education program practicums and student observations, Justin decided teaching was definitely for him. Justin commented, “I talked to my mother about being a teacher and the concern about not making enough money, explaining that construction management makes a lot more money.” My mother said, “Oh you won’t have to worry about money someday, it will be alright. Just do what you want to do, it will all work out.”

Justin finished his college career excited about entering the teaching profession and applying to five school districts his last term in college. Justin commented:

Being on the industrial tech side of things in education, I didn’t really have to search for jobs. Sure, I applied but that was about it, I received an interview at every school. The schools pretty much searched me out once I put my resume into their system. I didn’t have to go through a regular application process like a
lot of people did. You know, put your name in against 400 people. I had a job before I graduated.

Justin decided on a high school in Cedar Rapids for being his first teaching job. Justin stated:

One of the reasons I picked the high school or better yet the district was because the initial pay rate was higher than anybody else’s and when you’re young and coming out of school you just look at a number. You don’t look at everything else like benefits and all the stuff that play a role in taking a job.

The other reason Justin picked the Cedar Rapids high school was that it was close to where his best friend from high school was doing graduate school work at the University of Iowa. Justin felt this would work out well, because his best friend would be on the eastern side of the state, so he moved to the other side of the state and began what he believed was a great first step in the profession of education.

The first day of Justin’s school professional in-service meetings went well, getting the latest information on the school, meeting fellow teaching colleagues, and learning the general lay of the land. Of course, not everything was covered, such as when the first day of school came and it was lunch time, Justin didn’t know where the lunch room was for the faculty and how to even go through the lunch line.

He was assigned a mentor; at first Justin was excited because his mentor was a fellow teacher in Industrial Arts. But, Justin’s original excitement went to immediate dread when his mentor stated that he hated sports. Justin commented, “My mentor was very outspoken and told other people in the school that the only reason why I was hired was because I coached.” Justin quickly realized that he was on an island in his department and it was not going to be a good thing. Justin said:
Unfortunately I didn’t have too many friendships in the industrial arts department since my mentor basically slandered me. I didn’t let it get me down, I persevered through it deciding it would not be a major issue for me. Justin viewed his department in needing a lot of help as far as inter-personal relationships were concerned.

Justin was really bothered by what he saw as a lack of professionalism by some of the faculty at his high school. “There was a really large disconnect between myself and some of these other teachers.” Justin noted:

I’m a guy that can pretty much relate to anybody for eight or nine hours a day. I’ll do whatever I have to in relation to get along with someone. But these teachers were really anti-sports, when they heard that I was going to coach football and wrestling, they actually wrote a letter on my behalf to have me resign. They wanted me to resign from teaching because they didn’t want me distracted by athletics.

Justin went on to describe the low feeling he felt when he found a resignation letter, which was prepared by two teachers, was put on his desk while he was out of his room. He felt down because people in the system were treating him this way; plus, it was his first job. Justin stated, “I was a rookie. I thought this was kind of the way stuff goes, but I never disrespected my mentor until the day I got that letter on my desk.” Justin took the letter to the principal and athletic director; his immediate supervisors felt that this action was so serious they then sent the letter to the superintendent for his specific direction on how to handle the situation. It was intimidating at first for Justin, but when he fought back through the proper chain of command, the conspiring teachers were in shock. The teachers backtracked a little bit and from what Justin was told by his building principal was that the responsible teachers were reprimanded for the unprofessional act. The teachers never lost their jobs nor did Justin want that, he just wanted to work in an
environment in which he was accepted for being a teacher and a coach of school
sponsored activities.

Justin described his classroom as, "State of the art." His eyes lit up and his voice
sounded of excitement. He continued:

The classroom was awesome, that is what I liked about the high school that I
worked at, it was progressive. I had enough technology money to keep the
computers up and running. I had more than enough money to provide for the
consumables. Every day I walked into my classroom, I was happy, it was great.

Justin also discussed the students that he taught, "I had a 50/50 mixture of good
students and not so good students." Justin talked about liking all of his students, but from
a skill ability standpoint, some students either did not have it or did not want to learn.
Justin commented, "We had some students that were troubled, they were just there, they
were getting forced by the counselors into the industrial technology classes to get credit.
In their minds, the counselors and students, they were there to get an easy grade, and it
didn't work that way."

Justin described that his first year was so much different than his fourth year with
regard to classroom management strategies. In his first year, he would spend 45 minutes
out of 48 minutes per class trying to discipline students or control the classroom. The
problem cited by Justin was that when he tried controlling the classroom, he would be
spending all of his time on about eight or 10 students who did not really want to be there,
while he was not giving any attention to the students who really wanted to be there.
Justin commented, "Looking back on it there was a little bit of regret on my part that I
wished I could have taken the kids that wanted to be there and take them further into the
projects."
Justin described his classes as predominantly male students with a few female students scattered in, of course that sometimes became an issue. From Justin’s perspective, he enjoyed different types of students in his classes but his experiences with some of the male students in his classes towards the female students were interesting. Justin stated:

There were all of these male students with a lot of testosterone that were thinking they wanted to impress the couple of girls in the class. Probably just a lot of what other high school teachers deal with too, but I think I had a few more based on the make-up of my classes.

Looking back, Justin believes that he was scheduled with the most difficult learners, not intentionally, but because all the other industrial technology teachers protected their classes and because he was the new kid on the block, he taught the majority of all the introductory classes in industrial technology. The veteran teachers taught the advanced classes that normally meant a more invested student.

As Justin gained confidence in his abilities of classroom management and instructional methodology, he began to focus more on instructional improvement. He had an acceleration of classroom management strategies that proved successful; but he did not gain these from his mentor or, for that matter, anything the principal or school district did. He felt that he developed classroom management and instructional methods on his own. Actually, Justin felt that his sports training and experiences working with people contributed the most to the development of his classroom management.

The instructional aspects of his job were what he was really concerned with. Justin commented:
I was always concerned with, 'Am I pushing the students hard enough?' I was not as practiced as these other industrial technology teachers or my teaching peers and [wondered], would the administration see my weaknesses? But, what I have found out six and seven years later, is that I will see [my] past students out in the community or I will get an email from a specific student thanking me for what I did for them. That tells me I was on the right track with at least some of my students.

Justin now sees that the impression he was making on his students was effective, he just could not gage it at the time that he was being a success with his students. He stated, “That is why I went into teaching, because I wanted to help kids and though I could relate better to the psychology of high school kids versus middle school or elementary school kids, I wanted to help kids.” In his four years of teaching, Justin felt he did work hard on behalf of his students. He commented:

I spent a lot of late nights correcting papers; I even remember my wife helped me correct certain things on projects. I would tell her if she helped me I would take her and our son to Dairy Queen the next evening and then she would respond that I was really going above and beyond on our future date. We would both be laughing.

As Justin worked through his first year with all the difficulties that all teachers have to deal with, he became more confident with the curriculum and classroom management of his assignment. Justin became more and more acclimated to his high school and school district. Justin discussed when he first arrived at his Cedar Rapids high school that he either did not pay attention or there were so many other things going on in his life that he was unaware of the eventual change that emerged in his second and third year with the school administration.
Justin reflected on his school administration:

My principal treated me fine, but the culture of the school shifted from what I believed to be an education model to an economic model. The school went from being where the students had to be there to where we were trying to attract more customers. The customers were students and we were constantly being told to make the customers happy and the principal would be happy.

Justin began to see this attitude from the building principal and the assistant principals his second year. He began to get concerned based on what he was seeing and hearing by the other members of the faculty. As Justin pointed out, "I didn't believe everything I was hearing, but some stories were matching up through different departments and experiences."

He reflected about the thoughts of pushing the envelope a little too hard academically on students that he could be in the principal's office like other teachers had been. Justin stated, "If you gave too many F's, if you pushed the administration regarding disciplinary actions on a student too far, then they would become annoyed with the teacher." Justin admitted that he did not know the details of the administrative meetings, and maybe the principal was being told by the superintendent certain things. He understood that everyone had a job to do and for a principal it is to fill the desks and keep the spending within the framework of the school district resources.

As Justin talked about his first high school job in a new city in Iowa, he brought up coaching and how positive an experience it was for him. Teaching was a very positive experience for Justin, but coaching was an extra special benefit of the teaching job. Justin coached football and wrestling through his four years in teaching and he felt it really developed his teaching instruction because of his belief, "that coaching is teaching,"
and teaching is coaching." In addition, he pointed out the benefit of developing relationships with students outside the normal classroom environment and that is when he really felt that he became an important part of the school. Justin commented:

Being one or the other still would have isolated me in the school as far as helping students, but by being both a coach and a teacher, I could feel a positive impact I was making. Maybe I had a rough day in the classroom, I would switch gears quickly, walk on the practice field and end the day on a really positive note. And sometimes it happened the other way, great day in the classroom but not so great on the field but I still felt daily that I accomplished something with young people.

Even though Justin personally felt the positives of sports and his involvement in the school with students he eluded to an interesting perspective regarding school climate. Justin pointed out that the kids consciously did not know the school faculty division because they were not in the meetings, but he saw the self-imposed staff isolation. He called it the "dividing line," where if you coached you sat on this side of the room and if you didn’t coach you sat over on the other side of the room. It was easy to see, especially after Justin was there longer then his first year, and knew which staff members coached in the various sports and which ones did not. Justin reflected, "I always wondered why the principal didn’t do anything to mix the staff? Sometimes I thought she probably was too busy, and then other times I thought maybe she wants it this way."

While Justin figured out the ideological differences between faculty members, such as coaching versus no coaching or normal classes versus advanced placement classes, or elective classes versus required classes, one of the largest differences was coming to a large urban high school in Cedar Rapids. Justin described growing up in his small western Iowa town where everyone knew each other and everyone was pretty much the same. Then going to a relatively small liberal arts college in Nebraska of 5000 total
students on campus, with the make-up of the student body all predominately white, there were 42 African-American students who played a sport, with 2 Asian-American students who were not involved in athletics. Justin remembers that college was a big learning ground, educationally as well as socially. He gave an example:

There were a lot of things that I didn’t know such as say the word ‘boy’ in the wrong social setting could be interpreted as a derogatory racial slur....When I went to my Cedar Rapids high school, it was innately a large adjustment learning informally from students, what value structure they had for their ethnic heritage. In college, I picked up a lot, but even differences of ethnicity in college are vastly different from kids in high school.

Justin did have a class in college entitled *Ethics and Values* but none of the curriculum in that class carried over to his teaching job. Justin stated, “The students indirectly taught me more about diversity then I ever picked up in my younger life or college.”

For Justin, the tipping point in leaving education was more of an evolutionary financial reason. Because Justin knew how to work the field of construction, he was constantly getting side jobs to supplement his income on the weekends, school holidays, and the summer months. Justin commented, “I was making $800 a weekend doing construction projects and my take home pay for two weeks of teaching wasn’t much higher. It got to the point I was getting a lot of offers, there was a lot of work in the city and I was thinking I have a family to provide for.” Justin, who described having a hard working wife and was also working full time with two small children, continued:

That is when it hit, I needed to take this family stuff pretty seriously. I had a big responsibility to my wife and kids. I sat down, did the math on the situation and determined that I either had to do construction full-time or stay in education with the emphasis of getting a master’s degree to bump up my pay rate. I knew that if I picked a master’s degree I would have to go to school all summer, take away from my earning power from my construction jobs and then would get about a
3000 dollar pay jump. I was netting 3000 dollars in the summer about every two weeks depending on the job.

Justin believed he was doing the correct thing for his family, but he had never resigned anything in his life and he really did enjoy teaching. Sure, there were some problems in his high school, but nothing that overwhelming. He really liked teaching his students, his class sizes were good, his classrooms had great technology to use, and coaching was also very fulfilling. He was at a crossroads of what to do and for about eight weeks in the winter of his fourth year he would mentally go back and forth with the concept of staying in education or leaving the professional with total focus on creating his own full-time construction business.

The day came that finally pushed him to the construction business. Justin remembered the distinct moment or the trigger event, as clearly as he remembered his wedding day or the individual days that both of his sons were born. We all have those moments and professionally Justin had his decision-maker stem from a simple piece of advertising. Justin described the moment like it happened an hour ago:

It was the morning of April fifth, a Monday, and I am driving down Collins Road on the way to work and I am stopped at a stop light right by Chili’s restaurant. I look up at this billboard and on it was an advertisement that read, ‘Do you spend your Sundays dreading Mondays?’ And that was it! I did spend my Sundays worrying or contemplating about Monday morning. And that was the moment that I knew it was time to make the move.

Justin reflected about his experience in the educational field, his pride in saying that he was a teacher, and how proud he is of anyone that is in the teaching profession.

Justin stated:
I am extremely proud that I was a teacher. It is kind of like an alumni situation where you want to support your high school or college any way that you can. I support teaching in every possible way I can right now. When my two boys come home they get nightly emphasis on education where my wife and myself make sure they do their homework or we help them if they are stuck on an assignment. I hire some high school kids and tell them to keep learning. I see teaching differently now than I did five or six years ago. Actually, what I see is higher pay. I look at my peers that I would have been with that are still there and see them making a very good salary. It seems like the pay has caught up to itself and a teacher doesn’t have to live in poverty throughout their life. Looking back on it, I love my job right now but I also loved teaching, I just didn’t see financially how I was going to support my family.

Rick’s Story: Enough is Enough

Rick grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, with two parents, in a middle class neighborhood. He did well in school and decided that he would like to enter the field of education, like his two parents had, based on the desire to help young people. His father taught in a school district adjacent to Cedar Rapids, while his mother was an associate in an elementary school in the Cedar Rapids Community School District. Rick attended a small liberal arts college in eastern Iowa where he was active in different aspects of the college experience including collegiate athletics. As time went by in college, the big question for Rick was what major to declare. It was obvious to him that it would be education, but he was unsure of his specific curricular area of study. He enjoyed physical education as well as political science and decided that physical education was the route he would take in terms of the focus of his major, a decision that was based on his gratification of science, specifically anatomy and kinesiology, and his physically active lifestyle.

Rick talked about his college days and his specific education placements between his practicums and his student teaching. His practicums, mainly an experience that is
more involved than an observation but less developed as student teaching, were described as good experiences, “opening my eyes to the other side of the desk.” Meaning he was aware of the challenges of education, but this really focused in on what teachers had to do with respect to student achievement and motivation. Rick completed his student teaching at a smaller school district outside of the city of Cedar Rapids because the college’s director of student teaching thought it would be in Rick’s best interest to get out of his comfort zone of familiarity with the Cedar Rapids school system.

Rick enjoyed his student teaching, which included an eight week experience at a middle school and then another eight week experience at the high school. Because his sport eligibility was used up according to the NCAA definition, he volunteered to coach in the high school football program. Rick stated:

I had an excellent student teaching experience. Both my sponsoring teachers were experienced and worked their craft with ease. They made teaching look so easy to do, but in all reality it wasn’t easy at all. I remember feeling exhausted at the end of the day. I worked on a cement crew in the summers to pay for my college tuition and I never felt physically or mentally beat like I did after my first couple of weeks of student teaching. And then I went out and coached football, it was a shock to the system, but I adjusted. Some of it, I am sure, was just the newness of the situation.

Before Rick’s senior year ended, he had some legitimate leads for jobs once he graduated from college. There were opportunities in the southern part of the United States and there were two job opportunities in Cedar Rapids. In his mind, he debated both situations; there were pluses and minuses to both. Rick thought that going to a new geographical location would be an adventure, but also a little scary. By staying in Cedar Rapids, he was secure with the “lay of the land,” but it did not represent a new adventure for him.
Eventually he made the decision to stay in Cedar Rapid because the school district paid well and he had friends from high school and college in the area. In addition, his new wife, Julie, was from eastern Iowa and she did not want to move and leave her family. She graduated from an Iowa university and also had been offered a job opportunity at a Cedar Rapids parochial school. While the benefits were not great, she felt very fortunate to have an opportunity to teach without moving from the state of Iowa. With family paramount in his mind, Rick took a sought after physical education job at a Cedar Rapids high school. It was not the same high school where Rick had gone to school and he was excited about that, commenting:

Nothing was wrong with the high school I attended, but by going to this other high school, I was looking forward to a new challenge; a new experience to have kids learn about physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle. It was a little bit like I was moving, but without all the challenges of completely moving from a geographical perspective.

Rick was embraced by most of the faculty at his new job. He was assigned a mentor, whom he rarely saw due to scheduling conflicts, and the physical distance between their departments. Rick’s mentor taught math and Rick was in the physical education department, from a building layout the two could not have been farther away from each other. He described the assistance of an informal mentor, a physical education teacher and assistant football coach at the school, who truly helped him to adjust. Rick stated, “It wasn’t my assigned mentor’s fault, we had different schedules, with different preps and sometimes I had class outside. Actually an assistant football coach who taught physical education really helped me with understanding the ropes of the building.”
There were some teachers that were not too fond of Rick; he would later find out that these teachers viewed his hire by the principal as a coaching hire. Rick explained:

It wasn't until I was there for about six months that I was in the library looking at the resources available for the health class that I taught that the librarian said something to the effect that the only reason I was hired was because I coached. I was a little in shock. Of course I was hired to coach, but I viewed myself as a professional educator with extremely high standards for myself and my students in the classroom.

As Rick became more aware of his presumed hiring status, he began to feel that the physical education department chairman was also not happy about him being hired, having been told by her, who was a coach herself, "you weren't my first choice." Rick later found out that she liked what Rick did with students; she was very impressed, but she wanted a female physical education teacher in her department rather than another male.

As the year progressed, Rick began to feel at home with the students and really enjoyed his teaching duties. He had health class, which was more of a normal classroom setting, in which the class would discuss the topics of quality of life issues such as diet, exercise, and lifestyle choices. Rick also had swimming instruction in the swimming pool, as well as the normal physical education activity classes such as basketball and volleyball.

As the year ended, Rick believed he was being accepted by more faculty members based on what he was doing with students. Rick stated:

The students were great. I could see myself making a difference with almost all of them. I was getting better as a teacher and coach and was having some success in areas this high school had never experienced such as bringing in a scuba class to get students certified in scuba. The students thought it was awesome.
However, Rick expressed the realization that financially, the job may not be enough. He noted:

My first year was coming to a close and I was looking at my wife’s and my expenses regarding student loans and just the general cost of things with the concept of what we wanted to do in life such as having a house. We were living in an apartment at the time, it was a nice place but we eventually wanted to have a home with a yard and some kids. I remember sitting back and thinking unless I do something different, I’m going to be my father. Not that my father was bad, but we struggled financially. I didn’t resent him or anything like that, I just wanted to make sure I could take care of my family and get rid of some of our debt as quickly as possible.

Rick made a call to the cement company that he worked for in college to see if they had any openings for summer employment. They did and he went to work for them once the school year was over in early June. One day that summer a fellow co-worker made a pitch to Rick about getting into building homes. Rick thought about it but declined, his professional time obligations were filled with teaching and coaching. Construction work was just something that was going to get him some extra money to pay down his family’s debt and be a little more comfortable down the road of life. The summer went by quickly, Rick couldn’t believe how fast the summer went by between his construction job, going to player workouts at the high school, and just getting a little time off.

The first day of the school year for teacher in-service was here and the staff meetings had the same division with his teaching peers, but he was a lot more comfortable just because he knew everyone and all the systems in place. Actually, Rick reflected, “I was thankful I was in my second year; we had some new teachers and they
just looked clueless. Of course, that thought brought me down a notch because I was them the year before – clueless.”

In Rick’s second year, things began to change in relation to his first year. The physical education chairwoman still was very open about not enjoying Rick being in the building. In retrospect, he says he should have taken it more seriously, but at the time he did not think that it was a problem. Rick always got along with everyone. There were some people that he got along with better than others, but Rick believed he could at least keep personality differences neutral.

Looking at his schedule for the second full year, he could see he was still the one with the “tough” classes in relationship to the other physical education teachers, based on the number of students in his classes. His numbers were extremely high for activity classes in the gym; he had one class as large as 63 students registered. He talked to his department chair and principal about the high numbers, but both of their responses were the same, “work through it the best you can.”

Rick had two swimming classes that he really enjoyed because he felt more independent and there were normally only 30 students in each class. He said:

Think of this scenario; we have thirty kids in the water with all different levels of swimming capacities and I’m by myself in a very dangerous and possibly life-threatening situation for students and I feel relieved there are only thirty kids in the pool.

In the swimming pool, Rick began to be very creative and extremely rigid concerning what some students could do versus other students. Rick commented:

I had some students in swimming that were actually on the swim team and then I had other students that could not swim. The skill level was all over the place. I started using the kids from the swim team to help me with the kids that couldn’t
swim at all. And I also divided the students into skill levels, where literally, I would have beginners in the shallow side and no matter what they were never to get out of the shallow side, unless I was directly involved with the instruction.

Swimming class is where Rick believes a professional disagreement began between his principal and himself. The issue was based around Rick having students that would not come to swim class or would not dress for the class; they would stay in regular dress clothes and sit in bleachers watching class. He would mark the lack of participation, specifically not dressing out for class, down in the grade book and at the end of the term a number of the students would fail swim class for not participating. It was normally under five students per term. Rick stated:

I wasn’t happy or proud of the fact that kids were failing swimming class. I understood the social stigmas in that environment for kids, but on the other hand, how does an instructor pass a kid that does not come to class or will not dress for swimming? We live in a city with a river running through it. I could just see down the road a kid drowning and then it comes to light [that] he passed swimming class in high school.

Then Rick began to realize the power of the principal. The principal requested him to come to her office on his prep period regarding a swimming issue. As Rick sat down and listened to her comments, he was in disbelief. The principal mentioned that a parent called and could not believe his son would fail swimming and how this would impact his grade point average and his graduation since he was a physical education credit short. Rick was not prepared for what happened next; the principal asked him to change the grade from a failure to satisfactory mark. Rick refused. There was arguing back and forth, but at the end of the meeting, the principal seemed to be okay with the decision of not changing the grade.
Six weeks later at the senior graduation ceremony, the student that Rick and the principal were discussing walked across the stage as a graduate. The very same student that failed swimming Rick's swimming class. That event is when Rick came to the realization concerning the power of the principal’s office in either changing a grade or lowering the physical education requirement per this student. He never approached the principal regarding the specific situation.

He came to understand the importance of not crossing the boss, who had a long history of making life miserable for teachers who would not follow the principal's commands. As Rick discussed the incident with other faculty members, it became clear that there could be repercussions to him regarding this swimming incident. In his mind, he was wondering how could it get any worse based on what was happening in the department.

In Rick's second year, he figured it out fast; physical education was a dumping ground for counselors and principals regarding student scheduling. The physical education department did not have caps for total number of students in a class. If a specific student needed other classes that were only offered certain hours they would get them, such as AP chemistry or AP literature. Then the counselors would see that an hour was open, and the student would be slotted into a physical education (PE) class, even if that PE class had 54 students on the roster. Rick reflected:

It was a tough assignment because of how many students were involved every hour. As a PE teacher, you really had to be on your toes, because there were so many students. Almost anything could happen and it was not really the students fault; there were just too many people in a given space. I was lucky that no one really got hurt or drowned in the pool.
College education classes and student teaching were so much different than what Rick was involved in now. There was never this challenge as far as the number of students in class. Rick described the largest problem in student teaching was having enough equipment; now he had a situation with not enough equipment and way too many students, but Rick was enthusiastic, a problem solver, and resolved to make it work. He would borrow equipment and even buy extra equipment with his own money to make things work. The extra equipment did help solve some class management problems, but not all of them. Rick commented,

The numbers were so huge in some cases that it was like coaching the football team alone. I could run the kids on the track, but that was about it. We would play basketball, but 30 kids would have to be out watching while the other kids played for about eight minutes and then I would switch them.

Rick looked forward to the end of the year, hoping that the numbers would go down or the principal would see the need to hire another physical education teacher. In his second summer, he went back to work finishing concrete to make extra money for his student loans and vacation money. The second summer went by just as fast as the first summer with work, football workouts, and a short vacation to St. Louis to watch a couple of St. Louis Cardinal baseball games with his wife prior to the start of the new school year.

Unaware at the time, the third year would prove to be Rick’s last year as a high school physical education teacher. He went back for his third year of high school in-service meetings feeling everything was good. The summer break provided a much needed rejuvenation period. Despite some bumps his first couple of years, he felt he was making it work and was more confident that this would be his best year. Almost all the
students knew him and he had a good reputation of helping kids that really needed a teacher who could listen or would help them brainstorm out of a situation that they were facing outside of the school structure. That is why he entered the teaching profession, to help students in and out of the classroom. Rick stated:

I was seeing kids all over the place and they would say hello or I have you on my schedule next year and I’m really looking forward to your class. On those numerous moments I walked away feeling really good about what I was doing. I was making a difference.

Before the start of classes that fall, Rick was approached by the principal to see if there was a way for students that were taking swimming to pass even if they somehow did not have enough “dress out” days. Rick explained, “I really don’t know how you give someone a passing mark that obviously that student does not deserve.” The principal looked a little perplexed as Rick recalled, “She looked like I did not understand what she was saying. I would later find out from other faculty members that she was telling me to pass them no matter what the situation.”

Throughout the third year, Rick and the principal went back and forth discussing a number of students in class and passing kids in swimming. Then, the April day that Rick will always remember, he went to check his mailbox in the front office and there was a letter that came from the Cedar Rapids Community School District Human Resource Department stating that he had been surplused, meaning that he would have a job in the district, but that there was a reorganization of the teacher work force and some teachers possibly would be moving to different buildings. Rick went to the principal and asked, “What does this mean?” Her reply was, “Don’t worry about it. Things like this happen
in big districts but you should probably be back here next year.” The next year Rick was teaching physical education in a Cedar Rapids middle school.

Rick did various things to protest the involuntary placement, from visiting the human resource director, to talking to the principal many different times, to even searching out union representation on the rights of employees. Through all the various communication, a certain line in the binding labor agreement between certified employees (teachers) and the school district was referenced. Specifically, Rick stated:

A teacher can be placed in the school district for the good of the district. And who gets to decide what is for the good of the district? Of course, the school district gets to decide what is good for the school district. I talked to my father about possible actions and at the end of the conversation [we decided] that there were three things I could do; go to the new assignment, find a different school district, or quit. He made it a point to tell me not to quit without having another job.

The summer came and Rick continued to work full time with the cement crew, while at the same time, he would look online and in the newspaper for possible teaching opportunities close to Cedar Rapids. He did quit his coaching assignments at the high school with the concept that it would not be fair to the kids at the high school nor the kids at the middle school not being around after school. Start and end times for various high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools vary in Cedar Rapids, so the odds of everything matching up to be able to coach would be very slim. Rick also wanted to give his head coach a fair opportunity to find a replacement. In Rick’s own words, “It was the right thing to do.” Rick also figured that the way coaching opportunities open on a yearly basis he probably could have an opportunity at the new school if he waited a year and then something would open up.
In July, he received a letter from the Cedar Rapids Community School District, which communicated Rick’s new placement at a middle school. Rick did not want to be placed at the middle school for various reasons. One of these reasons was the travel distance from his home and the second was that the students of that school had a reputation for being difficult from a classroom management perspective. This middle school was very diverse, with a large proportion of low socio-economic students. The facilities, from a physical education standpoint, were subpar compared to the high school at which he worked previously. Rick admitted, “I had a poor attitude walking into the building the first day of in-service meetings. I didn’t want to teach middle school, I really enjoyed high school and could not really understand how this could happen.”

After the second month of classes, Rick came home and told his wife that he could not do this the rest of his career, and that this middle school was not a good fit for him. He would finish out the school year, but he would not be going back to middle school. Rick felt enough was enough and related:

I told my father that I was leaving and you should have seen the look he gave me. You could tell he was worried for me. He knew I made a decent salary and had good benefits, but I told him these kids don’t respect their parents let alone their teachers. In high school, the kids could figure out pretty quickly when someone was treating them well, in middle school it seemed like some kids wanted to be treated poorly. [These] middle school students had worse inappropriate vocabulary than what I ever dealt with in high school. I would sit down with a kid and explain why this was wrong and ten minutes later it would be F-you!

Rick did not blame his co-workers or administration at his middle school; he viewed them as hard working and caring professionals. As Rick put it, “Maybe I was spoiled in high school and didn’t know how good I had it. But I quickly found out, I just couldn’t see myself doing that for 30 more years.”
In late April of that year, Rick did not sign his contract for the new school year and submitted his letter of resignation to the Cedar Rapids Community School District Human Resource Department. In the time that it took for him to mentally make this decision to submit his resignation, Rick lined up a full-time job with the cement construction company that he worked for during the summers. He increased his salary by 20% and received health coverage. He had to pay out of his own pocket for his 401k program versus what teachers earned as a benefit with the Iowa Public Employee Retirement program upon their qualified retirement.

Rick reflected:

I really loved teaching high school students because you could see them grow, they would normally understand what you were trying to do for them. But as time has passed, I have feelings that maybe I was set up by my high school principal. I was warned that she does get what she wants and after my third year, I was transferred to one of the most difficult middle schools in Cedar Rapids. What are the odds? It is my opinion that the principal knew exactly what she was doing and simply I went against her wishes for not passing kids that would not dress out.

Mike: Not One Thing But Many

Mike is a younger looking 30 something's man who currently lives in San Francisco, California. He stands 5'10", with a slender build, brown hair, and glasses that make him look like he could easily be a rhetoric professor in a college setting. He is well spoken and articulates his ideas with a mannerism of thinking first and then speaking in a very direct and easy to understand way. Mike is someone that can talk to almost anyone on any subject and have the other person feel it was a warranted conversation.

Mike grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, going through the public education system from kindergarten through graduation as a senior in high school. He was a good student
and decided to go to an Iowa university, where in his first year, he was still unsure about what major he would pursue. It was at this time that a highly respected language arts teacher at his old high school died of a massive heart attack and Mike went back for the memorial service of this highly honored and distinguished teacher. Mike commented:

It was this event that triggered me to become a high school language arts teacher. It wasn’t my sorrow or any short sightedness regarding death, but more importantly, I saw how many people came to honor this man and the work that he did with young people. There was even an article in the local paper regarding his impact. By going to the memorial service, I physically saw the type of influence and meaning that a teacher had on his students and the community.

At that moment, Mike realized that teaching was the career in which he could open a world of opportunity for students. It was a unique career, which allowed for making a difference in a person’s life. That was the career choice that Mike had been looking for but did not understand until that memorial service for such an honored teacher.

The next term Mike went back to the Iowa university following the specific program of studies to become a language arts teacher. In his last term of college he student taught for 16 weeks at one of the five largest high schools in Iowa with an enrollment, at that time, of about 1900 students. It was a different experience from what Mike was used to from his high school student days in Cedar Rapids. He reflected:

It was an awesome student teaching experience. I had a great supervising teacher who really supported me in trying new things. I taught five classes of language arts to upperclassmen. Ninety percent of the students were going to go to college. From an academic perspective, it was really easy. The students were so motivated to do well, most of that came from their parents. The city I taught in was a university town, so I had kids whose parents were professors or doctors at the university hospital. There was a certain expectation on the students from their home that they would do their schoolwork.
Mike graduated from the Iowa university and then began looking for language arts teaching job that were located in an Iowa urban environment. He commented, "I knew I could not handle the Iowa small town thing, I'm a city guy and so I focused on places like Dubuque, Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, Sioux City." At that time, teaching jobs were tough to obtain based on what Mike would and would not take. Mike interviewed at different places, but with no experience, he was unable to obtain a language arts job offer in a large urban Iowa city.

He made a decision to substitute teach in Des Moines, Iowa, because the Des Moines Independent School District was the largest school district in Iowa. With a number of school districts bordering Des Moines it made sense just on the amount of possible future jobs available. Mike’s experience as a middle school and a high school substitute teacher was very enlightening. As a substitute teacher, Mike was in all kinds of different schools and was meeting different principals, teachers, and students. Mike stated:

I would suggest that for me substitute teaching was a paid fifth year of college. I learned so much and I was able to make comparisons between my student teaching experience, my own high school experience, and the different schools I was working at almost every day.

Mike worked during the day and waited tables at a restaurant at night to cover his expenses. As the substitute teaching year went by and spring came, new education job opportunities also blossomed throughout the state of Iowa. Ironically, a language arts job was advertised in Cedar Rapids at the same high school where Mike was a student years before. He applied, interviewed at his old high school, and after all the candidates were
interviewed, was offered the job. He accepted the position and moved back to his hometown and his old high school.

Mike remembered his first day of entering his high school as a faculty member, “It was surreal; I had a hard time believing I was back as a teacher. I was incredibly nervous and stressed.” As scheduled meetings with district leadership as well as building in-service meetings began to focus his time, Mike thought more of the job that he was hired to do and less of the irony of being in the same building. When Mike went to his first language arts department meeting, he felt comfortable with his peers, even though some of those peers were his teachers six or seven years ago. Mike stated, “The teachers treated me great as far as support was concerned. They accepted me as a professional from day one. When I had something to discuss, they made time for me and I really appreciated it.”

Mike had an assigned mentor, but he did not see the artificial forced relationship nearly as helpful as available professional colleagues that he would talk to daily. Mike commented:

I can’t even tell you who my assigned mentor was. I know I was assigned one during the first week of in-service because we formally met. But after that time, I really didn’t see him. He was down the hallway about 100 yards on the first floor and my room was on the second so there was a proximity issue.”

As Mike taught his first year of classes in Cedar Rapids, the principal in charge of class scheduling gave him five hours of language arts instruction that were focused on predominantly ninth and tenth grade students each term. Depending on the specific class, his class size would be anywhere from a low size of 20 students to a large class of 32 students. Mike initially had trouble with his large classes, because he really was not used
to the size, but as time went by it became easier to deal with that many students all in one hour. He felt his students enjoyed being in his class because he was younger and more in tune with what was going on in the social world of young people. In his third and fourth year of teaching, he felt his status as a teacher changed from a concept of “like” to “respect” regarding his students view of him. Mike worked hard on the people side of education, of course he wanted to have students learn to read, write, and speak better, but he also wanted them to feel a “security” in his classroom. Mike stated:

The paramount thing that I always tried to do that I think helped me to be successful in the classroom was [that] I wanted to make sure that every single one of my students, regardless of their background or who they were, that they felt that I at least respected them and that I was treating them as human beings every time they came into my classroom. That each student left my classroom feeling respected.

Mike really enjoyed his students at the Cedar Rapids high school; he viewed them as some of the best teachers he ever had. He commented, “In many ways those students were the most challenging teachers I have ever had. They were not going to let me get away with anything, in addition they were also the most honest and the most forgiving.” He described thinking often of these early students, wondering what they are doing and how their lives are developing, wondering if he made as much of an impact on them as they did on him.

As Mike was finishing his second year of teaching, he became aware that his old high school was changing. Of course, there was the fact that Mike changed and recognized that he was not a high school student anymore. But he was aware that the school climate was changing, not only from an administrative standpoint, but also from a faculty standpoint. Mike had empathy for how tough being a high school administrator
must have been with all the demands from the community, the superintendent’s office, and the faculty themselves. Trying to keep the school running, but making effective change in the improvement of the school was tough. Mike reflected, “The high school and the local community was going through a change of its own. We were getting a lot more needy kids without a lot of support from parents or unfortunately the concept of no parents around.” Mike viewed the administration as being very effective with regard to keeping things running smoothly and effective.

From a faculty standpoint, Mike believed they were at a crossroads concerning collegial climate. Mike stated:

From a faculty standpoint, we were in definitely a state of flux. The status quo was starting to be interrupted a little bit based on a very large number of newer teachers being added to the faculty. There were years before at this high school where there would be maybe one new hire for the entire building and my year there were ten new teachers.

Mike witnessed a paradigm shift to what he attributed as a force change from the federal government. He was hired right after the federal legislation of Leave No Child Left Behind and could see the legislation force a different way of thinking, at least from a school administration standpoint on his high school. Mike reflected:

The high school was always a middle class school with not a lot of extremes. The school was well respected for fine arts and sports, but these two areas were not going to be accounted for within the federal legislation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), so the administration was trying to make meaningful improvements. I don’t think they knew exactly how to do it.

Mike defended the administration and what they were trying to do versus NCLB with understanding how hard it was and is to make the changes. Mike stated:

Unless someone is daily on the inside of the school with all the things young people are going through, they have no clue of what education is like today in any
school whether that be in Iowa or California. I had my share of helping young students that the formal curriculum did not address. Was I there just to teach language arts or was I there to teach students? I always picked students whenever there was a question.

In relationship to his other educational experiences that he had from his university and substitute teaching days, the Cedar Rapids high school Mike worked at was well kept and very clean, considering it was about 50 years old. The administration made keeping the school as “clean and up to date as possible” a priority and it showed through the custodians’ work. There were three custodial shifts in a 24 hour period with Mike’s room being cleaned daily. Obviously, not all students would pick up things but it wasn’t uncommon to see some students pick things up in the hallway or the cafeteria.

Mike received all the school supplies he needed; that never was an issue. There were faculty meetings where the administrator in charge of supplies would ask us to conserve and if there was a big print job to be done they would ask us to send it down to the central print shop that the school district operated. However, Mike never had to worry about having enough paper, transparencies, markers, or any reasonable supply. Mike commented, “When I needed something I would go to the main office secretary and ask for it and by the end of the day it was in my mailbox.”

His classroom was cramped when he had 32 students, but nothing that was unbearable. He enjoyed his own classroom and was thankful that he was not a traveling teacher as he witnessed some new teachers in other departments traveling with their teaching cart because they were assigned to teach in five different classrooms throughout the day. Mike said:
Not only was I thankful for not being a traveling teacher, I had a second story room that had all windows on one wall so you could see what was going on with the weather and have natural sunlight. In the afternoons, it sometimes got hot because it was a western exposure, but that was only in the early and late part of the school year where the temperature in the classroom became an issue.

Mike entered his second year excited; he felt that he had an excellent first year. The administration seemed happy with his performance, and he felt he had made positive relationships with many of his students. He was actually looking forward to talking to his past students to see how their experiences in the summer had turned out. During his summer Mike waited tables at a local restaurant to earn some extra money and he went on a short four day vacation. Mike discussed how the majority of that first summer he reflected on how he would be a better teacher for the next year or see something in the paper that would kick-in a thought of teaching a specific unit better. Mike commented:

I was surprised how much I thought about my teaching during summer break. You always hear people tell teachers that they get three months off in the summer. But that first summer, I was evaluating in my own mind, at my own speed, how I did for those previous ninth months as a teacher. Each year I taught the intensity was extreme and the summer was always a reflective playback or rewind of the previous year.

During that first summer, Mike came up with an idea to start a club for students called the gay and straight alliance. It was Mike's goal to have the club teach diversity and understanding to students by showing and discussing the differences that people of the world have in his own high school. As the school year started, he approached a number of students about his idea and the students thought it was a great idea, they took control of the leadership and Mike was just there for support. They would use his room once a month for meetings; if they had any questions on how things worked in the school he would explain the specific policies and procedures. Mike said:
One of the things that I'm actually really proud of at the high school was that we were able to get the gay and straight alliance started there and at first it was a bit of a controversy. But I think once it was in place, it was fine. I think it was a benefit to the school by creating a safer school and a safer environment for all our students and a more cohesive and empathetic student body.

When discussing what Mike meant about controversy at the high school, he mentioned the normal stereotypes of gay and straight people. Mike commented, “Iowans say they are open to differences of people, but in certain situations what they say versus what they do are two very different things.” Mike believed opening the student organization to all students that the stereotypical misunderstandings especially in young people had an opportunity to be discussed and addressed by young people in a non-threatening environment. Mike said, “The administration really supported me on this new club, [but] they did take a little heat inside of school as well as out in the community.” Sexuality for young people is an important process towards development as a man or woman and most schools do not have programs to openly discuss these issues with students amongst students in a non-judgmental way. Mike believed he contributed to his high school opening up to these student-led conversations. The organization still exists at his old high school.

As the second year continued, Mike was still undergoing a formal evaluation process with regard to his teaching abilities. As stated before, the administration was very supportive of Mike regarding his faculty sponsored activity, but they were just as supportive in his classroom instruction. Mike had a veteran assistant principal assigned to him who had 15 years of experience as a classroom teacher and just as many as an administrator. The assistant principal spent a lot of time with Mike talking with him
about how to improve his skills as a teacher. Mike remembered multiple meetings where the assistant principal would always discuss the 3R’s. Mike restated them, “You know the three R’s – Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. I laugh now thinking how simple that was but the assistant principal cared not only about me but about the students.” He talked to Mike on many different occasions about developing professional relationships with students and pushing them in the classroom, as well as making sure what was done in the classroom mattered.

As Mike finished his second year he was getting more and more comfortable with his abilities. He understood that he was a work in progress as a teacher, but was refining his instructional capabilities and his relationships with students and other faculty members. He learned the seniority side of education where Mike commented:

> It was obvious after being there a couple of years that the more seniority a teacher had that teacher would get to pick their teaching schedule. As you put in your time, a teacher would get more autonomy. Not that this seniority thing was bad, it was just something I wasn’t aware of as a past student and substitute teacher.

While the seniority concept was different for Mike, the autonomy aspect of teaching was liberating for him. He was told what books would be used for his ninth and tenth grade classes and what types of writing assignments should be given to his students. But the freedom was striking for Mike as he commented, “There wasn’t anyone checking on me saying, did you do this?” He really enjoyed the structure of curriculum that the school district set forth for new teachers in their specific area of education, and also the fact that the school did not micro-manage instruction. In Mike’s words, “There was enough guiding to assist the teacher, but not so much were you felt like a robot where you were being told what to do every step.”
One thing Mike was having difficulty with was the time structure of teaching. As he said, "There is always something to do, something that needs to be done in education. Whether that was correcting essays, getting ready for a teaching schedule change due to an assembly, or just the general intensity of the job." As a past student, Mike never realized the commitment of the staff to teaching students, but as a teacher, that was his focus, that was why he was there and it was not always easy. Mike commented, "Teaching is a difficult profession because of so many personalities and situations that are constantly being juggled throughout the day specific to dealing with trust and responsibility." The core philosophy that Mike had regarding the profession of teaching was the establishment of trust with every person that he came in contact with through the school day and by this action he hoped to develop the responsibility of his students.

Mike taught all types of students. The majority of the students were very similar when discussing the demographics of the community, but there were outliers on both sides of the spectrum. These students were the challenges, not in a good or bad way, but just in a teaching way. Mike described an event that he will never forget and one of his best days in education:

I had a really, really tough student in one of my sophomore classes, I can still remember her name, it was Julie. She was skipping my class a lot and we would butt heads on a consistent basis. I was teaching a creative writing class and the unit was on poetry. One of the poems that I assigned the class to read and respond to had the "F" word in it. The next day we had a discussion in class and Julie didn’t really like that this word was in the poem, even though she would swear all the time in my class. Obviously, I would correct her consistently on the inappropriate language. Julie started to go off a little bit, saying, ‘I don’t know why you would have possibly assigned this and she just goes off about F’ing poetry.’ I don’t know what possessed me to do this but I just looked at her and shot right back stating, ‘Well how is it not fucking poetry?’ and the room just froze. The other students could not believe what I had just said to Julie. Julie
takes a second to respond and does so poorly with stuttering one word, “Well...well...well”. And then the strangest and most rewarding thing happened, you could figuratively see all the lights going off on the rest of the students, they sit up in their chairs and start answering the question, and begin academically debating the question of whether or not this is poetry. In my mind, I am thinking this is what older educators had talked about regarding the teachable moment. I felt it from the students, I could see it come from my students, and it was an awesome experience. The funny thing, as I reflected on that class the following days was a thought that came back to me consistently. That though being no matter how long I planned, or how well prepared I was for any given situation, I was going to be thrown curve balls every so often and I had to be ready to deal with it in that moment of time. Julie taught me that day that I could have teaching success even though it was a strange way to accomplish my lesson.

Mike truly enjoyed teaching and had a lot of good days, but there were some bad days as well. He talks about when possibly he allowed his emotions go to extremes. He would be flying high on a good class and a good lesson and then if he would have a bad class or a lesson that bombed and he would take it very personal. Mike described an event that he will always remember:

It was in my third year and I was teaching a research unit to my ninth graders. Looking back on it, which I have many times, it was probably a little too ambitious for the age level. It was a case where I had bitten off more than I could chew. I don’t even remember the exact thing that happened that set me off, but I do remember that I was working so hard to make it work and three-fourths of the class were into it and were making it work. Unfortunately I had one fourth of the class that were being influenced by three girls that always did not want to do anything and I could never get them to do anything. I had called their parents, I spoke with the counselor, I talked with the administration; it was daily that these three girls would show up to my class and do nothing. In fact, in their minds they were going to do whatever they could to make my life hell and they were starting to pull other students into their plan. We were in the library working on the project and I heard these girls complaining about something, which I internalized and something clicked in my mind that said ‘I can’t be here.’ I told the librarian ‘I’ll be back in a moment’ and I walked out of the library and walked into the language arts office and I started to cry as I leaned over the top of the copy machine. I was thinking how I was ever going to be able to go back into the library. At that moment a colleague came in and asked what was going on, then another came in, both were asking what had happened. I explained the situation and they were very compassionate and said, ‘That happens to everyone; you can
do this and you will return to the library.' I pulled myself together went back to the library and finished class.

Mike talked about how fortunate he was to have understanding and caring colleagues around him at the very moment that he needed that support. He stated, "Without those other teachers, I would have never went back, I would have left the building never to return." As Mike described that event, he emphasized that it probably put him over the top of getting out of the field of education. It was not the event by itself, but along with the rest of the intensity of education he decided he wanted to experience other opportunities.

It was not one single event or factor, but rather, many separate things that brought him to the realization that it was time to exit the profession. He stated, "I really enjoyed teaching there, but it was time to move to other things." He knew he had to leave after his fourth year of teaching high school language arts or he would be too reliant on the paycheck and buying a house to make a move to new opportunities. He talked about the moment in the library with the three girls that was not necessarily the reason for his departure, but contributed to his decision to leave the teaching profession. There were a lot of little things, some in the school, but many within Mike. Mike was 27 after four years in education; he viewed himself as young with the whole world waiting with opportunities.

Mike said, "There is nothing wrong with Iowa, I grew up there, but I didn’t see myself living there the rest of my life." Mike now makes his home in California and works in the culinary arts profession. Mike concluded:
Every August rolls around and I think about getting ready to teach classes. That is one thing in education that is cool, there is a start and there is a finish and no matter how last year went, whether good or bad, there is a new excitement for a new group of students with a fresh start all around.

**Stacy: The Ones Who Didn't Care**

Stacy is a 30 year old mother of a six month old daughter, happily married to her husband of four years, and currently living in Dallas, Texas. Although getting married hurried the process of her leaving the field of education after only four and a half years, it was her intent to change professions due to her experiences in two Cedar Rapids high schools. She began to seriously doubt her decision to become a teacher in her second high school placement, but it was actually her first teaching job that jolted her into the realities of education versus her self-imposed definition of what teaching was intended to be for teachers and students.

Stacy grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and was educated through the various levels of the Cedar Rapids Community School District. She was from a middle class family that valued education and emphasized a strong work ethic in all aspects of their lives. She was active in sports throughout her middle and high school years and performed very well. In eleventh grade she became “hooked” on history because of what Mr. Williams, who she described as the “best teacher that she ever had.”

She explained that Mr. Williams opened a window in her mind about history and teaching. For some reason, he had the ability to make the pages of the textbook come alive; he could make the events become relevant. He never talked about the profession of teaching, but after Stacy watched him and how he interacted with students she was convinced that the profession of teaching was in her future.
Stacy went to a large Iowa university where she described herself as the "normal" college student, working hard academically during the week, but also having a lot of fun through the university sponsored events during the weekends. Her grades were very good and she entered the college of education, where she studied to become a secondary social studies teacher. Stacy emphasized that the teacher field experiences and practicums were good, but looking back on those initial teaching exposures at various schools they did not prepare her for what was to come as a professional educator. Her last student teaching placement before graduating with honors was to be her first career job.

Stacy’s last student teaching assignment was in a Cedar Rapids high school, it was not the one that she graduated from high school, and she was excited about how her university set that up on purpose. She commented, “I wanted to have a different experience; I wanted to see how another high school in my hometown worked.” She talks about her cooperating teacher, Mr. Bolden, with the upmost regard and respect:

He was older and would offer little pieces of advice that were like educational shortcuts, something you would never think of as a new teacher going into the profession, but [that] were worth their weight in gold. Mr. Bolden was a lot like Mr. Williams who was her high school history teach, both of their approaches to history was about making it important and relevant in a student’s life. He would tell me weekly that the students might not remember what I teach them, but they would remember how I treat them.

Through Stacy’s hard work and a great recommendation from Mr. Bolden, she was hired as a long term substitute for a teacher that was on a medical leave. Stacy thought it was a great opportunity and could not believe her good fortune. She ended student teaching on a Friday, graduated on a Saturday, and was working as a paid
professional educator on the next Monday. Stacy stated, "Before the university graduating ceremonies, I would run into friends from the college of education saying they didn’t know what they were going to do because they had no leads on a job." The principal seemed to like what Stacy did the next three weeks because she offered her a position the following six months as a long term substitute that paid in the Cedar Rapids Community School District as a first year teacher with full benefits for the same teacher that was having a serious medical recovery issue. Stacy understood she had to continue to prove herself, but also considered this an opportunity of a lifetime. At the end of the six months the principal came to Stacy and offered her a full teacher contract for the next school year. Stacy was extremely excited and accepted the position on the spot.

Stacy was working in the summer in preparation of the social studies classes she was told she would be teaching. She knew next year would be a challenge but also believed she was ready for a great opportunity based on her previous work in the building.

As the school year started, Stacy felt fortunate, she was around Mr. Bolden if she needed any "extra wisdom," she had her own air-conditioned room, she was getting paid well, she was teaching five classes with about 25 students in each class. Life was good until mid-term scores came out and she was called down to the principal’s office. Stacy had a star football player in class that was failing and because he was under 20 hours of passing academic work he would be academically ineligible for the rest of the season.

Stacy was told in direct terms from the principal to figure out how this player would be eligible by Wednesday or as Stacy told it, "this could impact your teaching
status at this high school.” Stacy walked out of the office bewildered and upset. She immediately went to Mr. Bolden and explained the situation and he advised Stacy to call in the student and make him do extra credit in front of her. Mr. Bolden explained, “Stacy you don’t want to get on the bad side of this principal or you will not be here.”

Stacy did exactly what Mr. Bolden suggested but began to think of moving to a different school as soon as the year was over. She was devastated concerning the concepts of academic integrity and the construct of working hard. As Stacy commented, “My professional innocence was taken by that principal. I woke up to the realities of education. They never taught us at the university to pass students who did not meet the minimal requirements to pass the class. I reluctantly passed the student.”

Stacy continued to work hard with her students, but was professionally uncomfortable to be around the administration. She made a decision to leave the school as soon as a quality opening happened in the school district. Fortunately for Stacy, Cedar Rapids had six middle schools and four high schools, which availed opportunities to move within the district, she just had to do a great job at her current high school. As opportunity would have it, a full time position opened at her old high school at Christmas time, for which she interviewed and was hired immediately. As Stacy packed up her things and looked around her old room, she was thinking how fortunate she had been:

Getting a teaching job directly out of college, having had some issues with the principal at this school, but getting a new opportunity mid-year, which is practically unheard of in the education profession, and going back to my old high school, where I graduated from; how much more could you ask for?

She moved into her room at her old high school during winter break preparing for teaching United States history, a freshman law class, and senior economics. As she
started her new job, she was surprised by all the teachers that would help her when she asked for assistance. Stacy was shocked though by the lack of support she received from her assigned mentor from the social studies department. Her mentor never met with her one time in her career at her old high school.

The administration was very supportive with whatever Stacy wanted from a curricular standpoint; in her own words, “If I asked for something, I received it. Even though I watched other teachers ask for the same thing and get turned down for some reason; I never had a problem.” Stacy did not know exactly why it was that way with her new high school, but things were off to a good start and she wanted to keep it going in a positive direction. She coached track at this high school, which helped with reaching students. In addition, she loved track; it was something she participated in during her high school years. The school year ended with Stacy feeling good about her new environment and looking forward to the next year. Although she missed Mr. Bolden, she was getting professional guidance on different occasions from three different social studies teachers.

Stacy was making positive connections with students and faculty and was feeling at home. As the school year ended, Stacy was given her teaching assignments for the coming year. It was three preparations with students from ninth through twelfth grade. She taught ninth grade Geography, tenth grade World History, and twelfth grade economics. It was a daunting task for her second year, but she had the summer to prepare for some of the classes that she would be teaching that she, in her words, “had not mastered yet.”
The summer flew by, Stacy was excited, and she felt that she had a handle on the curriculum until the first day of faculty in-service, where she was told by the assistant principal in charge of curriculum, that she was going to teach all the classes that she had prepared for plus an additional elective entitled Ethnic Diversity. Stacy explained to the assistant principal that she was not prepared for this fourth preparation. The assistant principal told her, "That’s okay, it’s an elective, do your best and help me get through this year with scheduling."

Stacy worked hard, getting to school normally by 7:00 AM and staying usually until 5:00 PM correcting student’s assignments or planning for the next day’s lessons. She was single, so it was easier to put in the time, compared to some of her married teaching colleagues, who would describe how busy they were with their own children’s responsibilities such as dropping off and picking up their children from daycare or other activities.

When the track season started in February, Stacy’s schedule really became intense. She would get to school early for preparation, so she could run things off on the copier or reply to emails, then the teaching day would start. After school, it was right to the track and coaching her athletes and then normally back to her classroom after practice for additional time to correct assignments or work on a project that came down from the principal in a new initiative he started at the high school called "Professional Learning Communities." As Stacy described it:

My spring schedule with teaching and coaching was crazy. Sometimes I didn’t know if I was coming or going. I also had seniors in economics class, so I was under the gun by the counselors and administrators to pass them, since it was a
required course or they would not graduate. I look back at it now and wonder how I got everything done.

Stacy’s second full year of teaching had come and gone. It was a wild teaching and coaching schedule, but she was beginning to feel comfortable with some of her classes. Economics was still challenging, some of the challenge was because of the difficulty of the curriculum, and the other part of the challenge was that she was dealing with seniors in high school. Some of the students really did not want to extend themselves to learn. Stacy described it this way:

I had some really great kids that were awesome, but I also would have four, five, maybe six in a class, where most of my time was being spent on these students that would do nothing. At the same time, I was getting pressure from the counselors and administrators to do something for them so they would graduate.

At the end of the year, Stacy was told her schedule for her third year. It was the same as the last year with one exception; she was going to teach Ethnic Diversity and was additionally assigned United States History. A new class that she had never taught and a different grade level, United States History was an eleventh grade class, based on this new schedule Stacy was teaching every grade level during her teaching day. Stacy went to the assistant principal and explained her position again concerning multiple teaching preparations plus a new class that she had never taught before. The assistant principal explained that she understood and was not pleased herself but she was limited in what she could do for Stacy due to limited funding by higher-ups in the central office of the school district. Stacy was asked to do this for one year and the assistant principal would try and do everything she could to change it. As Stacy reflected, “What was I going to do? Say no? I felt like I was getting played, but what choice did I have?”
The summer came which allowed Stacy time to refine her classes and she worked on her curriculum for the United States History class. Stacy commented, “My social studies colleagues were great. If I had a question or needed something, they would pretty much help out any way they could during the summer. How awesome was that?” During the summer, Stacy made a goal to try and reach every student. Although during the previous two years, she had been trying to master the curriculum of each subject, this coming year, she was going to come up with some ways to reach all of her students.

As the new school year began Stacy was excited about her new students and unfortunately like the previous two years, she began to get bogged down by the daily grind of the school day and her curricular teaching duties. The very thing she had worked so hard to do in the summer by getting all of her classes ready did not seem to have a major impact and it was out of her control. Stacy explained:

I went into my third year thinking it would be different, but once the school year started, it was just like before, and I actually realized why it was happening. It was too many preps and a principal that kept piling work on us through his professional learning community concept. Every Wednesday afternoon, kids would get out early and we would meet with other faculty members on a specific committee. Nothing really changed in the school from a test score standpoint or a climate standpoint. It was pretty much a complete waste of time. The kids loved it; they got out of school early every Wednesday.

Stacy reflected on what she said, “Maybe the professional learning community thing would not have been such a big deal if I could of hit my own goal of reaching every kid.”

The third year was as work intensive as the previous year, and the one that possibly pushed Stacy out of the teaching profession. The specific incident Stacy pinpointed was in the late spring about four weeks before graduation. She was getting emails from parents and counselors regarding specific students and whether they would
graduate because they were doing poorly in her economics class. She had an economics class in which three seniors refused to participate. They turned in assignments, but the assignments were frequently half completed and there were occasions in which they would not turn in homework assignments at all. Throughout the term, she talked to the students directly, emailed the parents, talked to the counselors, in the hope of reaching the students. All strategies had no positive response, demonstrated no sustained positive impact on any of these students. These three students were not behavior problems; they simply refused to do anything.

Stacy thought about differential learning assignments for these three students and devised an assignment on supply and demand that took in some other concepts that they had been studying throughout the term. She talked to each student about why this was so important not only for their own lives, but also to pass the class, which in turn will allow them to graduate. She explained to the students that she was accessible for help and if they needed any assistance, she was available in the morning as well as throughout the school day. Two of the three students did exactly what was asked on the assignment, they took it seriously and their work proved that they had learned something in the class. Stacy could justify to herself as well as to the administration that these two specific students met the minimum competency of economics. The third student, Mike, turned in his assignment half done. Stacy was shocked, upset, and disappointed. Mike had a 59% in her class, and his work that he handed in was less than that grade. The biggest disappointment for Stacy was that she, for whatever reason, did not reach Mike. Stacy
said, “Economics. I get it that some of the economic concepts won’t change the world for an 18 year old, but what I could not accept was Mike outwardly did not care.”

Mike was the poster child of what Stacy said was the “trigger point” in ending her teaching career. Stacy stated:

He is the one I remember by name, but definitely was not the only one that I could not reach. Getting up early to go to school, going home at 6 or 7 every night, coming to school on the weekends to put in more work, and at the end of the day, there were many students that just didn’t care, and I couldn’t change that attitude. Maybe I was a young idealistic teacher? I had a lot of great students, but the great ones did not impact me nearly as much as the ones that did not care. I just could not accept the apathy of students.

Stacy passed Mike with a D-, he graduated with his class. Stacy went into her fourth and final year in education newly married. She made a conscious decision to work professionally, but not the enormous amount of hours that she had been working. She was very professional and had a positive attitude with her students. By Christmas, she and her husband decided to relocate to Texas at the end of the school year. She was beaten down due to teaching four different classes and she was tired of students not caring. Her plan would be to look for a new profession in the field of writing or journalism, possibly for a newspaper or national publication. She has not gained that opportunity to work in journalism, but did work for a college in the admissions office before she had her new daughter. She has no desire to go back to public education due to the recurring thoughts that she reflected on regarding not being able to reach the students that did not care about their education. Stacy is still proud of being a teacher and respects the profession at a very high level, it just was not the right fit for her.
CHAPTER V

DIFFERENT PEOPLE BUT SIMILAR RATIONALES

In this chapter, the rationales cited by the participants from their narratives in Chapter IV are clarified with support from the literature. Throughout the six participants’ reasons to leave education the varying conclusions were driven by different themes for the different teachers and their experiences. The following is a brief analysis of the characteristics identified in Chapter IV.

School environment was a major reason for dissatisfaction. Perceived school environment factors included administrative support, challenging students with respect to academic ability, challenging students with respect to behavior, lack of effective mentoring, professional colleagues, physical environment of the classroom, and lack of parental involvement. The work place environment was a critical factor in the participants’ decision to leave. Teacher finances also entered into the equation and play a role in the research of others (Futernick, 2007; Ingersoll, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990, Scholastic, 2010).

Intensity of profession or work load was cited consistently by the participants as a cause for dissatisfaction. However, this factor differed individually by their classroom experience. These factors may have included the number of different classes taught, number of students in their specific classes, amount of preparation for their classes, evaluating student assessments either summative and/or formative, changes in terms of what they taught year to year, internal committee work for the school, school district bureaucracy, and extracurricular commitments before and/or after school. Similar
research directs readers to similar conclusions (Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersoll, 2003a; Israel, 2009; Palmer, 2007).

Teacher compensation was cited as an important consideration. However, it was noted that this was not necessarily the primary reason for the majority of the participants to leave the profession of education. Teacher compensation included the salary the new teacher was earning and any additional income derived from the school district for other duties that directly or indirectly impacted student learning, such as an activity sponsor, fine arts director, and/or coaching. Other research has addressed these issues as well (Ingersoll, 2002; Moulthrop et al., 2005).

Teacher preparation programs, provided by a university or college field experience provided teacher skill sets through required coursework in pursuit of state licensure and were the norm for all participants. Five of the six participants received their teacher preparation program from an Iowa university or college. All six participants graduated from a four-year accredited college or university.

**Multiple Dynamics Working At The Same Time**

Although there have been many studies done in the pursuit of finding one overriding factor explaining why teachers leave the teaching profession, the participants in this study emphasized, without collaborating or collusion with each other, that leaving the teaching profession has many dynamics playing out at the same time within the day-to-day career of a teacher. There is no one catch-all solution that will impact every teacher who decides to leave the field of education. The solution to the new teacher attrition problem is indeed multi-faceted.
Rationales given for a new teacher leaving the field of education (i.e., new teacher attrition) that were mentioned previously focused on school environment, intensity of profession, teacher compensation, and teacher preparation programs. Some of these rationales were the primary reason identified by the participant as the cause of leaving the teaching profession. Other rationales were secondary areas of annoyance for the new teacher, which eventually contributed to an increase in frustration over time. The key is that what may have been considered a primary reason to leave for one new teacher was possibly a secondary reason for the other new teachers. In order to illustrate and to better understand the reasons for leaving, as cited by participants through their narratives, Table 1 identifies the participants (the number in parenthesis denotes the total years of experience before deciding to leave) as well as the primary reason(s) and secondary reason(s) for leaving the profession.
Table 1

*Rationales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (yrs experience before leaving)</th>
<th>Primary Reason(s)</th>
<th>Secondary Reason(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob (3)</td>
<td>Perceived lack of Administrative Support</td>
<td>Lack of Parent Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intensity of Profession</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not teaching in subject area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric (5)</td>
<td>Perceived lack of Administrative Support</td>
<td>Intensity of Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School District Bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin (4)</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Intensity of Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike (5)</td>
<td>Intensity of Profession</td>
<td>Lack of Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Environment</td>
<td>Time Structure in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple Personalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick (4)</td>
<td>Perceived lack of Administrative Support</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intensity of Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy (4.5)</td>
<td>Perceived lack of Administrative Support</td>
<td>Student Apathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intensity of Profession</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bob, Eric, Rick, and Stacy felt that school environment and specifically a lack of administrative support was the primary reason for them to leave, while Justin identified teacher compensation as his primary reason. Mike had a multitude of reasons based on the school environment. He specifically focused on intensity of the profession as well as classroom management.
Administrative Support

In the majority of the participants' stories, they communicated in different ways that they felt competent in their skills and abilities and that their classrooms were their sphere of influence and as professionals, they were in control. However, these same new teachers told stories of the need for administrative support. The new teachers in this study wanted to work for someone who respected and supported them and who would help them become better teachers. In four of the six studies, that did not seem to happen.

Based on the narrative analysis of the participants in this study, increasing administrative support could have been enough to keep some of them in the teaching profession. Bob, Eric, Rick, and Stacy were very open about their perceived effect of what they felt was a lack of administrative support on their decisions to leave the profession. Possibly all of them would have stayed if their principals would have taken more time and showed more concern to their individual situations. This rationale coincides with a report written by Hanson and published in the Congressional Quarterly Researcher in 2000, which referenced the education think-tank group who surveyed teachers that stated, "82% of teachers would prefer more supportive administrators to more money" (p. 639). Administrative difficulties from a teacher's perspective have been consistently cited by new teachers and veteran teachers alike as a main cause for leaving the profession (Anderson, 2010; Boyd et al., 2009; Davis & Bloom, 1998; Ingersoll, 2002, Richards, 2004).

There are a large number of rules, policies, and procedures that school administrators have to deal with that establishes accountability for the profession.
Although new teachers do not always understand the legalities of the situation, it is commonly not because they cannot understand these concepts, but that there is not enough time to explain them. This takes time on the part of school administrators, for which, in a large Iowa urban high school setting, administrators do not always have the luxury of this resource.

As many teachers in a high school would point out, school administrators have direct and indirect motivators at their disposal, such as class size, number of classes being taught, specific hours of teaching, ability of students, and a classroom to exert accountability (Cheng & Cheung, 2004; Ingersoll et al., 2004; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Scholastic, 2010). It was Stacy who seemed to constantly “take one for the team” concerning different preps that eventually wore her out. The assistant principal in charge of scheduling had direct control regarding this issue, yet continued to ask Stacy for the assistance in scheduling versus the other way around.

Eric, on the other hand, had no administrative support, including the legal construct of teacher evaluation. Eric had no actions by his high school administration that research would indicate as being necessary for success. These factors, lacking from Eric’s experience, include regular observations and meeting, reasonable workloads, and bureaucratic guidance (Genzuk, 2010; Ingersoll, 2007; Richards, 2004).

Intensity of Profession

Intensity of the teaching profession was the second most referenced reason by the participants for leaving the teaching profession. Mike reported this factor as his sole primary reason for departure; whereas, Bob cited it as a shared primary reason, and
Justin, Stacy, and Eric mentioned it as a secondary reason. In all of the participants’ stories, even though each had different experiences, each teacher referenced intensity of the teaching profession. Stacy had multiple teaching preparations, Bob had classroom behavior issues, Eric had multiple teaching preparations and computer issues, Justin had multiple teaching preparations, and Mike had what he viewed as challenging behavioral students and a huge commitment of time throughout the school year. Rick even documented to his principal and department head the intensity with respect to student safety that he felt in his physical education assignment due to the large class sizes.

When discussing with veteran teachers about the strategies that they used to modify or check the intensity of the education profession it was extremely individualized. This is due to individual situations such as large class sizes for an industrial technology teacher versus multiple essays to correct by next Friday for a Language Arts teacher. Veteran teachers faced some of the same factors that the participants of this study were faced with but for whatever reason they just made adaptations faster. Graziano (2005) stated,

New teachers are expected to assume a full schedule of classes, create their own lesson plans, and classroom-management strategies in relative isolation. They are also expected to learn quickly the administrative ins and outs of the job, from taking attendance and communicating with parents to navigating the schools’ computer network and finding the faculty bathrooms. (p. 2).

Numerous statements by the participants involved focused concern for themselves knowing the curriculum and were they using the curriculum correctly in order to challenge the students. Justin and Stacy both went into great detail with concern for their students’ learning and the uncertainty of where they should be as an instructor with
regard to pace and sequencing for their semester classes. Ingersoll et al. (2004) stated, “... teaching is an occupation beset by tension and imbalance between expectations and resources, responsibilities, and powers” (p. 21). Justin and Stacy were very concerned about outward expectations by students and administrators. They also agreed that their internal expectations were self-imposed by both of them to be the best in their field.

Although mentoring was required for new teachers by the state of Iowa, Eric, Justin, and Mike described their mentoring experiences as ineffective, at best. Possibly with a better veteran teacher match by the specific school, it could have impacted two out of the three participants to stay in the field. Eric and Mike both talked about their experiences where mentoring was “artificial and forced” or “there was no mentoring.” Research has supported that new teachers need feedback specifically designed for new teachers (Hope, 1999; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Watkins, 2005). Assigning a quality mentor is one key to the success of a new teacher. With the correct mentor, the process of new teacher acceptance at the high school is intertwined with a veteran teacher who is approachable concerning technical assistance, subject methodology, career advice, and maybe the most important aspect for a new teacher is with regard to their psychological support in a challenging career (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Egan, 1985; Davis & Bloom, 1998; Israel, 2009).

Compensation

Justin’s primary reason for leaving education eventually focused on teacher compensation. Bob and Rick identify teacher compensation as a secondary reason for their departure from the field of education. In Bob’s and Rick’s situation, raising their
salary might have been enough to maintain them in the teacher workforce, it is inconclusive if that would have been enough in light of what they viewed as their primary reason for leaving which was administrative support. Justin was very forthright and open with regard to how much money he was earning on the weekends and during the summer in the construction business.

He seemed to have a viable claim with regard to his professional skills that were used in the classroom, but also allowed him to transfer these same skill sets to the construction business, where he was and is financially successful. It is unclear to what level Justin’s salary would have had to increase to have him stay and whether the school district could reasonably meet that target in relation to other certified staff members. “While there is abundant evidence that increasing salaries can help retain teachers, the political reality is funding for such increases is limited” (Imazeki, 2005, p. 448).

Justin was concerned with teacher compensation before he entered the profession so he was extremely cognizant that teaching was not financially lucrative. “Teachers make 14% less than professionals in other occupations that require similar levels of education. In real terms, teachers’ salaries have declined for 30 years” (Eggers & Calegari, 2011, p. OP1). Justin seemed to informally understand this fact.

Bob and Rick evolved intensity of the profession with compensation to form a construct in their minds that they were really not being paid well enough for all the things that came with the teaching profession. As some teachers enter the professional world, they do compare themselves financially with other professionals, in so doing an awareness permeates into the new teacher that they are below their non-teaching friends
and possibly will never make up the difference without major investment in advanced
degrees or second jobs outside of the school day and/or during the summer (Darling-
Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2000, 2004; Moulthrop et al., 2005).

Tipping Points – One Trigger Event

Although not always clearly evident in the narrative analyses, each of the six
participants described at least one primary reason for leaving, in addition in some case
secondary reasons for quitting the teaching profession where also significant factors. In
each participant’s story, the participants reflected on at least one real life educational
event that triggered their decision to leave education. The difficulty in examining the
rationales for teachers leaving education is the critical aspect of the complex processes
and organizational management practices on a daily basis within a high school. It is
through these daily challenges and frustrations that the teacher reaches their tipping point
and the only thing missing is a trigger event in making their thoughts of leaving a serious
option and then a reality. In this research study, each participant described tipping points
either formally or informally, and each one identified a trigger event or the event that
pushed them away from the field of education as a viable profession for them (Gladwell,

For Bob, the story was repeated with different students but he was in an intense
classroom management situation concerning discipline and was not in the curricular area
he wanted to teach. The trigger was in his fourth year where he had a difficult group of
students who made excuses for why they could not do something from an academic
framework. Eric related the story about the need for his computers to work in his
industrial technology classes, but the bureaucracy of the school district wore him out. Justin discussed teacher compensation but openly discussed how other faculty members in his own department treated him poorly. Mike talked about not one reason but many, eventually discussing the need to move because if it was to happen it was going to be at that time in his life. For Mike the trigger moment happened with the students in the library that gave him a difficult time. Rick talked about classroom management concerning high numbers, but eventually his transfer to a middle school was his trigger event. Finally, Stacy’s discussion focused in on administrative support but her trigger point for leaving was student apathy in relation to how much work she was doing to try and help one specific student. Table 2 identifies the tipping events and what the participants viewed as the trigger event that contributed to making their decision to leave education.
Table 2

**Tipping Points and Trigger Event**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tipping Points</th>
<th>Trigger Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Lack of Parent Involvement, Not teaching in subject area, Paperwork – IJAG &amp; IEP, Administrative expectations</td>
<td>In his fourth year and students came in with every excuse not to do anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Mentoring was poor, Classroom was very hot and cold, Long hours including extracurricular events, Number of Special Need Students</td>
<td>Meeting with district computer tech support director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Kids being in his class that didn’t want to be there, Classroom management, Long hours including extracurricular events, Poor relations with colleagues in department</td>
<td>Driving to work and reading the billboard on Collins Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Mentoring- artificial, Long hours, Time structure in education, Multiple personalities through the day, Challenging students</td>
<td>Situation with specific students in the library that caused Mike to breakdown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Faculty relationships, Classroom management high numbers of students, Administrative issues concerning passing students in swim class</td>
<td>Involuntary transfer to a middle school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>Student teaching did not prepare her for the experience with her first administration, Multiple teaching preparations that changed, Long hours including extracurricular events, Additional Meetings – Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>Having Mike pass even though he should of failed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the participants in this study experienced a level of frustration with more than one factor as an educator, providing the impetus for their departure from the
profession. For the majority of the participants, leaving resulted from a mixture of factors happening at the same time within their experience. Participant experiences are not only defined by professional experiences, but also personal. As such, each was different and unique from the experiences of other participants, for which the management and administration of education has no control. The resulting difficulty in attempting to resolve the primary issue is that resolving the primary issue for one participant, such as increasing teacher compensation for Justin, might not have a long lasting impact on the other participants (Israel, 2009; Johnson & Birkeland, 2002; Jehlen, 2001; Silverblatt, 2010).

In summary, there are no simple answers to correct the issue of new teacher attrition in Iowa schools. The majority of new teachers who leave education have a multitude of tipping point experiences that contribute to their decision to leave the profession. The key is the trigger event, which ultimately prompts them, through a professional educational event or series of events, to leave the profession. Not all the variables of teacher attrition are within the control of state guided mentoring programs. Strategies such as school site professional learning communities, an improved school district salary schedule, or even a teaching friend that is in the classroom next door, can make a difference, either individually or in combination. However, in some cases, the element of change rests solely within the teacher. In some cases, a new teacher leaving the profession is the correct determinant for all parties involved.
Recommendations

Some of the rationales for teacher attrition that were identified in this study are within the control of and implicate the organizational systems or decision makers of education. Although no one educational entity is solely responsible for a new teacher that decides to quit education, there are windows of opportunity that can be reasonably formulated in the professional development and maturation of a new teacher.

As a young student enters a university setting, the windows of opportunity in the understanding of what it is to become a teacher now open in the form of different experiences, such as a college classroom teacher preparatory program, observations, practicum placements, and student teaching. Once they graduate and get their first professional teaching job, the next windows of opportunity are focused on first year mentoring programs, building principal leadership, and school district leadership usually within the form of the human resource department. It is through these varying forms of experiences that new teachers will develop into a model professional, or will allow doubt and frustration to result in the attrition of a new teacher. The following recommendations, based on the findings of this study, focus on key components to assist the teacher candidate becoming a successful new teacher professional.

Teacher Preparation through the College Experience

Teacher preparatory programs, specifically the traditional collegiate track, need to consistently evaluate their assessment tools responsible for entry into the education program. Once entry has been gained by the individual, it is important to place prospective teachers with experienced teachers in a real school setting as soon as possible
(Cochran-Smith, 2004). An emphasis is needed on experiential learning, focused through case studies, similar to what student pilots do in flight simulators and at the same time with a pilot instructor. By offering course work in a more meaningful and contextual education atmosphere with emphasis on the problem solving approach, pre-service teaching students will gain the ability of a strong learning pathway that replicates what possibly will happen when they are in their first career experience (Duck, 2000). Teacher preparatory programs are significant in defining what is required of a professional teacher and to develop the professional habits, such as being a collaborative teacher as well as being an active and reasonable contributor to their school and community (Chelsey & Jordan, 2012).

In addition to the push for school districts to be more collaborative, with professional learning communities at the school site level and within curricular scopes of the school district, it is imperative that new teachers learn about formative assessment as well as summative assessment to align content preparation and assessment to student learning (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2010).

Classroom management practices by good teachers are fundamental skill sets that should be emphasized in teacher preparatory programs. Teacher preparatory programs should have multiple exposures in ways to manage student behavior and build good student-teacher relationships in the classroom paralleled with lessons that engage student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2006).

All of the participants in this study had coursework in classroom management strategies and tactics in their collegiate experience, but many were still negatively
impacted by student behaviors. This would suggest that there is a need for continued classroom management skill sets for an extended period of time for all teachers, whether new or experienced. No teacher education program can cover every student management scenario at every level of instruction, but a truly comprehensive base should be instituted.

Although classroom management is a significant issue for all teachers, communication with parents and guardians is equally important. The new teacher will face a continuum with respect to types of parents, from apathetic to what is commonly known as a helicopter parent that hovers over their child's every move (Taylor, 2006). Parents will show emotion in every spectrum, from disbelief to anger to overt happiness. The future teacher will need to know how not to be controlled by a conversation nor intimidated by parents who normally have more experience in a school setting than the new teacher. It is imperative that the new teacher develop communication skills with respect to speech and email with the goal of being a "team partner" for the success of student learning. By creating a learning atmosphere on communication as soon as possible in the collegiate program, the teacher candidate will strengthen their level of effective communication for the school to home alliance, which is an essential foundational tool for all teachers.

Communication techniques and strategies should be practiced in teacher preparation training. Unfortunately, this can be an issue due to the limit of a teacher candidate practicum experience, because many professional teachers will not allow for practicum student teachers to communicate with parents for various legal and sociological reasons (Dyches, Carter, & Prater, 2012). The teacher preparation program
should institute positive and negative communication scenarios to assist the teacher
candidate with regard to developing viable responses to diverse parental concerns
regarding their student (Dorman, 1998; Harris, Igel, & Clemons, 2008).

Teacher candidates need to be educated early within their program on the varying
forms of teacher compensation defined not only as net pay, but also on the varying
benefits of the profession, such as health insurance, dental insurance, and varying
retirement accounts. In addition, cost of living, quality of life factors, and future self-
investment into graduate school or continuing education should be communicated in
relationship to their proposed professional relocation. In so doing, teacher candidates
who view monetary rewards as a high motivating factor would have time to alter their
career choice before completing their teacher education program.

All of the participants in this study had a cooperating teacher for student teaching.
All the participants had a neutral or outstanding experience during their student teaching,
yet they all agreed that student teaching was very different in relationship to when they
took over in their own classroom. In some cases the problem could be an inability to
accurately simulate a solo teaching experience for the student teacher due to having only
one or two student teaching experiences.

Colleges and universities should assign direct observations, practicum, and
student teaching experiences that are different in geographical make-up and have a clear
articulated purpose, such as observing an IEP meeting or viewing how teachers develop
formative assessments. Colleges should partner with school districts to only have student
teachers placed with teachers that will provide excellence in preparation and induction
experiences, but also the college or university could pay additionally for their select teachers to contribute in the student teachers classes before they go on-site into a school district (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Danielson, 2007; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2004).

The intensity of the profession should be communicated and simulated as soon as possible in the undergraduate program with the purpose to create a mindset in the teacher candidate that education at times will be a harsh, consuming, and demanding career. As a new teacher, there will be experiences of jubilation, excitement, and intrinsic reward, but there surely will be days of self-doubt, anxiety, and uncertainty. The new teacher will have to be able to create and deliver lessons, create assessments, analyze data, communicate with stakeholders within the school and community, manage and lead students, juggle administrative responsibilities, and possibly deal with psychological and/or physical issues of students that happen outside of the school day all within the new teacher’s work day. It is almost impossible for the college teacher education program to replicate this true to life experience, but the more times it is discussed, the awareness of the intensity of education should grow for the teacher candidate with a comprehension of what will be expected of them as a new professional educator.

Mentoring at the School

New teachers in the state of Iowa are assigned a formal mentor for two years. The mentors are selected by the school administration and are paid to work with new teachers. Some of the participants in this study pointed to a facade concerning their mentoring program. The mentoring program can only be as good as the level of concern of the administrator(s) responsible for the execution of the program at the building level.
The actual selection of the mentors should be evaluated yearly, the minimal time of interaction between the mentor and the new teacher should be stipulated, and there should be a yearly assessment of the mentors. Especially in large school districts, a mentor should be a teacher that is in the same curricular area, within the same building, and ideally has at least one planning period that is identical to the new teacher. Mentors should be trained and have reasonable accommodations given by the administration with regard to their schedule in order to observe the new teacher. The new teacher should also be encouraged to watch the mentor in their teaching environment. The level of support should be informally extended past two years, because a new teacher is still developing past the two-year point. Ideally, a mentor could be a recently retired teacher who would welcome being a part of an incubation period of a new teacher’s career and who could focus on the mentoring role as a ‘value added” opportunity in relation to their past teaching career (Cohen & Fuller, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, Strong, 2009).

School Leaders: Administrative and Collegial Support

Teachers leaving the profession, both new and experienced, cite a lack of support by their school administration and/or faculty as the primary reason for their exit. The majority of the participants in this study unknowingly agreed through their personal narrative with past research indicating that administrative and collegial support is one of the key factors in determining whether new teachers will continue or leave the profession. With this knowledge, it is imperative that school districts and school principals focus on the needs of new teachers and what methods can be used to assist with the continuous
At the start of the school year, the new teacher should be counseled on setting realistic goals to meet the needs of the students, school, and the school district. This training/counseling for new teachers would typically encompass classroom management strategies, curriculum development, assessment, and communication interaction. The plan should be measureable and obtainable for the new teacher where progress can be seen throughout the process, such as authentic pieces of evidence used by the new teacher from their classroom. If for some reason there is a lack of development by the new teacher, then the administrator could suggest professional development activities to strengthen this area as soon as possible (Jones, 2012; Nieto, 2009; Stansbury, 2001).

One administrator from the building administrative team, which could also include the new teacher’s mentor, should provide immediate contact with the new teacher, and maintain communication on a daily basis, if possible. An administrator needs to make regular visits to the classroom, whether formal or informal, with the understanding that these administrative visits are to assist the new teacher in a new setting. Ironically, students will visually see the administrators in the classroom so students will informally realize that their education is important enough that those in charge want to see and be a part of what is going on in the classroom.

In addition, there needs to be an agreed upon brief consultation in which the administrator and the new teacher can analyze and reflect on how a lesson was executed or on a multitude of different events that happen in the classroom setting. The
administrator needs to make time, which cannot be manipulated based on the day’s events by either party, for a new teacher in the form of being a supportive and instructional leader (Brock & Grady, 1997; Danielson, 2007; Menchaca, 2003).

It is imperative that school administration, at all levels of a school district, focus on the mentoring program as an administrative tool that insures the execution of high quality mentoring to assist development of a new teacher and consistently evaluate the mentoring program yearly with adjustments as needed. The school district should require training and on-going support for mentors specific to the development and focus amongst professional adults. The majority of the mentor time should focus on instructional development with secondary time spent on psychological welfare as needed (Ganser, 2002; Strong, 2009).

Collegial support comes in varying forms for a new teacher in a school. In some cases, it is a friendship that develops because of similar interests; in other cases, it is working side-by-side in the setting of a professional learning community; and sometimes, it is just that teachers’ classrooms are across the hall from each other. Although it is impossible to force friendships within a school environment, friendships are one of the most important and valuable components when challenging situations happen in a classroom and school. By developing friendships with other teachers in the building, an assimilation process happens to the new teacher where they are not new anymore, but a valued member in the school community. The culture of acceptance is controlled by the faculty and school administrative team, it is in working together that new teachers, and for that matter, all constituencies in the school feel valued. Multiple things can be done
by the school administration, within the parameters of tact and legal considerations, to encourage an acceptance bond. There are numerous ways an administrative team can create a "value" bond that is professionally appropriate and acceptable within a school.

**Recommendation for Further Study**

This study of teacher attrition gathered data from new teachers who had left the teaching profession with five or fewer years of experience. The data in this study is limited to only new teachers, at the secondary level, that have left the teaching profession in an Iowa urban school district. All participants completed a traditional collegiate teacher preparation program.

Teacher attrition has been an issue for numerous decades, due to the complexity of the issue and the new teacher generational change that coincides with changing individual values, sociological values, and expectations of the profession of teaching. The findings and conclusions from the study provide the basis for several directions for future research. As such, additional studies are recommended in the following areas:

- Conduct a study with elementary and middle school teachers from an Iowa urban school district.
- Examine a different Iowa school site that has a high new teacher attrition rate.
- Conduct a similar study at rural Iowa schools.
- Use a quantitative method to conduct a similar study, looking at some of the findings of this study as factors affecting attrition, and enabling generalization of the results.
• Conduct a study for participants who earned their teaching credentials from an alternative certification source.

• Conduct a study to find out in Iowa what high school administrative teams are doing for the support of their new teachers.

Conclusion

New teacher attrition has been an issue in education for many years. This study confirmed the findings of researchers who identified the multi-complexity or the varying elements of a teacher's world and the intensity of the teaching profession, which has been a major reason for teachers to leave the profession.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six new teachers who left the profession within five years of beginning their teaching experience in an Iowa urban high school setting, specific to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A narrative was written based on the first interview with each of the participants and was sent in printed format for their review. A second interview was scheduled and conducted within seven weeks of the narrative that was sent to each participant where member checks were used for the accuracy of the narrative as well as a clearer understanding of the participant's experiences and reflective analysis.

The general findings of this study included the following connotations for administrators of schools, administrators of school districts, instructors of teacher preparatory programs, as well as instructors of school administrator preparatory programs. Eight points can be offered as a result of this research. First, new teachers suggested multiple factors contributing to their choice to leave the profession; however,
participants generally described one primary rationale for the decision to leave the profession. Second, educational leaders at the collegiate level are critical to the quality and relevant teacher preparation programs in preparing teachers and administrators. Third, mentoring programs are successful, but they need to be evaluated annually and consistently by both school district administrators and individual school administrators to their effectiveness on an individual teacher basis. Fourth, collegial support is extremely important on the day-to-day happenings of a new teacher within their school. Acceptance and assimilation are keys to a new teacher feeling a part of the school. Fifth, school administrators are essential to supporting the success of new teachers. Administrators must identify and understand the factors that influence new teachers and work toward learning new ways to positively influence teacher attrition. Administrators should look at their school environment, identify factors that motivate teachers to be long term professionals, and provide multiple forms of teacher support on a consistent basis. Sixth, new teachers have a responsibility to understand the commitment they are making in order to work in a profession that can be both challenging and rewarding on a daily basis. A new teacher will sometimes be asked to provide instruction and leadership to students in an environment that is not always conducive for the ultimate learning and teaching experience, but they will be expected to adapt, overcome, and succeed for the good of everyone involved. Seventh, a certain number of teachers will leave education regardless of the well-intended efforts of the school community. New teachers are in a constant state of professional evolution and self-evaluation that is developed through perceptions of daily professional and personal events. These perceptions, no matter how much a
spouse, colleague, or administrator tells them differently, are their reality and thus, very hard to change. In some cases, these perceptions are warranted and a new teacher should leave the profession. Eighth, there is no single answer for the new teacher attrition issue due to the multiplicity of issues and, with it, the multiplicity of potential solutions.

The positive development of a new teacher is as fundamental as positively changing the future of every student that enters the classroom. A new teacher will provide instruction while a mentored, faculty assisted, and administrative aided new teacher will provide students with an education.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IOWA URBAN EDUCATION NETWORK SCHOOL DISTRICTS

(Iowa Department of Transportation, 2010)
APPENDIX B

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND COUNTIES OF GWAEA

School Districts and Counties
served by
Grant Wood Area Education Agency
APPENDIX C

IOWA SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF GWAEA

Iowa School Districts Served by the Grant Wood Area Education Agency

Alburnett,
Anamosa,
Anamosa St. Patrick
Belle Plaine
Benton Community
Cedar Rapids Metro Catholic
Cedar Rapids Trinity Lutheran
Center Point-Urbana
Central City
Central Lutheran |
Clear Creek-Amana
College Community
English Valleys
Highland
HLV
Iowa City
Iowa City Regina
Iowa Braille
Iowa Mennonite
Iowa Valley
Isaac Newton Christian Academy
Linn-Mar
Lisbon
Lone Tree
Marion
Mid-Prairie
Midland
Monticello
Monticello Sacred Heart
Mount Vernon
North Cedar
North-Linn
Olin
Scattergood Friends
Solon
Springville
Summit School
Tanager Place
Tipton
Vinton-Shellsburg
Washington
Washington St. James
West Branch
Williamsburg
Williamsburg Lutheran Inter-Parish
This qualitative study will use narrative techniques to gather and analyze data. Narrative analysis uses story-telling, which takes as its object of investigation the story itself. The investigator will ask the participants to tell their story of becoming a teacher, being a teacher, and deciding to quit the teaching profession. The investigator will ask follow-up questions to clarify and understand answers. Only my dissertation committee, committee chairman, Dr. Reed, and I will have access to the information contained in this study.

The initial questions that will be asked of the participants will be:

1. Explain your story about going to teach at your first teaching job?
2. Explain your story about deciding to leave the teaching profession?
3. How did you envision the teaching profession as a future teacher?
4. How did you feel about the teaching profession as a practicing teacher?
5. How do you feel about the teaching profession now?
6. What level of support did you receive in your first teaching job?
7. What type of students did you teach?
8. How do you think your students felt about you?
9. How did you feel about your students?
10. In your opinion, how effective was the administration at your different teaching experiences?
11. Elaborate about your school climate.

12. What was your physical work environment like?

13. Can you describe your physical work environment?

14. Describe the physical appearance of the building and your classroom.

15. Describe the socio-economic background of your students.

16. How large were your classes as far as number of students?

17. How did you feel about your class size?

18. What do you feel were your contributions to the school and to the students?

19. Acquaint me with the leadership of your school. Who were its leaders?

20. How did the administration, staff, students, and community show appreciation to you?

21. What support systems were in place for you from the administrative staff?

22. What expectations did the administration have for teachers?

23. What expectations did the administration have for students?

24. Describe your relationship with the administrative team?

25. Describe your relationship with your teaching colleagues?

26. How did you feel about your compensation package (salary, health benefits, retirement benefits, etc.) provided to you by the school district?

27. Describe the availability and the use of technology in your past school.

28. How were gender differences handled at the school you taught at concerning staff?

29. How were gender differences handled at the school you taught at concerning students?

30. How were staff race differences handled at the school you taught at?
31. How were student race differences handled at the school you taught at?

32. How was seniority differences handled at the school you taught at with regard to staff?

33. What was your commute between school and home like?

34. Where did you live in relationship to where you taught?

35. Evaluate the parental involvement and support that you received at your school.

36. What was the amount of paper work you had to do at your school? Correcting assignments? Report cards? IEP’s?

37. How did you initially feel about going to work? Did it change?

38. Explain the safety and security measures available to you and your personal belongings at your school.

39. How did you feel about the successes of your students?

40. How much autonomy did you have in delivering your lessons?

41. Explain to me about the staff development at this school and in the school district.

42. Let’s go back to your teacher education days in college, was there anything you would of liked to have more of in your teacher preparatory training that would of help at your school?

43. Describe the best day in your professional career at _________ school.

44. Describe the worst day in your professional career at _________ school.

45. If you could use two or three words to state the reasons why you left the teaching profession what would they be?
APPENDIX E

INITIAL INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Initial Human Participant Rapport Interview Script for Secondary Teacher Attrition in an Iowa Urban School Setting

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

Initial Script established through a phone call or face to face interview;

Hello, my name is Jim Dostal and I am currently working on a qualitative research study through the University of Northern Iowa concerning teacher attrition in an Iowa urban high school setting and you were identified as a possible candidate to have a discussion. This initial conversation will only take a couple of minutes to see if you would be interested in participating in the full interview. You will have full confidentiality in your name and responses. Pseudonyms will be used for your name and high school you taught at during your teaching career. Do you have a couple of minutes to answer a few questions?

Great! I need to tell you that this study was approved by the UNI IRB. There are no direct benefits to you, nor any foreseeable risks. If you have any questions now or later about your rights as a research participant I can give you a number to call, do you agree to participate in this short interview?

1. Did you leave the teaching profession within five years of being a full-time teacher?

2. What high school did you work at in Cedar Rapids?

3. What do you feel is the biggest challenge for new high school teachers entering the teaching profession?

4. What do you currently do?

5. Were there any professional educator skill sets that helped you enter into your current career?

6. Would you be interested at a later date to be a full participant in this study?
I really appreciate you taking a few minutes out of your day/evening to answer these questions. Would you be interested at a later date that fits into your schedule to be a full time participant for this study?

(Name of initial participant), thank you very much for answer my questions, have a great day/evening.
APPENDIX F

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: A Qualitative Study of New Secondary Teacher Attrition In An Iowa Urban School Setting

Name of Investigator: James Postal

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University of Northern Iowa requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate why new teachers are leaving the education profession that have taught in an Iowa urban secondary school. It is also focused on new teacher perceptions regarding rationales for entering the teaching profession, their undergraduate teacher preparation programs and their career placements until they determined to leave the education profession. Finally, this study will attempt to examine the differences and similarities that these teachers had within their first years as a career educator and possible suggestions to other new teachers on how to succeed in the early years as a professional educator.

Explanation of Procedures: The study will be made up of two interviews with three teachers from an Iowa urban secondary school setting. Participants of the study were identified as having five years or less of teaching experience.

The interviews will occur during acceptable and mutually agreed upon times by the participant and researcher. The first interview will take place with approximately eight weeks of time passing before the second, follow-up interview will take place between the participant and the investigator. An audio tape will be used in order to record audio communication during the interviews that will be used by the investigator as a reference for accurately defining each participant. Audio tapes will be destroyed by the investigator once the dissertation committee has approved the dissertation.
The interviews will last as long as the participant feels comfortable communicating on their experiences and beliefs regarding being a new teacher in an Iowa urban secondary school. The investigator will also take notes during the observations that will include possible non-verbal communication and observed behavior of the participant. The total participant committed time will be no more than three months.

All information gathered during the interviews will be kept confidential. Results of the study will be shared using fictitious names of the study participants that the participant can actually make up or allow for the investigator to make up on behalf of the participant.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort to participate in this study.

Benefits and Compensation: There is no direct benefit or compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in transcription and field notes. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference, if applicable.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all in the study.

Questions: If you have any questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study in a general context, you can contact Jim Dostal at 319-363-8805. You may also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-3217, for answers to questions regarding rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement: I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this study. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.
(Signature of participant)  (Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)  (Date)

(Signature of instructor/advisor)  (Date)

[NOTE THAT ONE COPY OF THE ENTIRE CONSENT DOCUMENT (NOT JUST THE AGREEMENT STATEMENT) MUST BE RETURNED TO THE PI AND ANOTHER PROVIDED TO THE PARTICIPANT. SIGNED CONSENT FORMS MUST BE MAINTAINED FOR INSPECTION FOR AT LEAST 3 YEARS]
APPENDIX G

RELEASE FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Permission Form to Audio Tape for Jim Dostal's Dissertation Study

I, __________________________, agree to be audio taped for the purpose of collecting data for Jim Dostal's dissertation entitled, "A Qualitative Study of New Teacher Attrition In An Iowa Urban Secondary School Setting". I understand the data collected will be used only for the study and participant's names and positions will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be recorded in field notes rather than actual names that would identify participants. I also understand that once the field notes are collected and data is analyzed, the audiotapes will be destroyed once the dissertation is approved by the dissertation committee.

Signed:

______________________________
Name of Participant

______________________________
Date
APPENDIX H

RECOMMENDATIONS

A study needs to be initiated and executed based on the limited information available within the Grant Wood Area Education Agency – Area 10 region focused towards the Cedar Rapids Community School District, in an attempt to identify why new teachers are leaving this geographical area at a rate currently higher than any other area education agency region in the state of Iowa. The interview questions should be designed to draw out information that identifies rationales that new teachers who have quit the teaching profession deem as credible. The result of this study could impact the knowledge of Iowa urban school leaders which could then develop and possibly institute methods and programs in order to assist quality new teachers to remain and excel in the teaching profession for the good of future generations of students.

Initial school district in-service programs for new teachers as well as college teacher preparation programs could benefit from this study by identifying methods, procedures, and possible strategies to assist new teachers in the difficult transition from a university student setting to that of a professional educator. Additionally, in accordance with the state of Iowa teacher to teacher mentoring program, this study could assist veteran teachers in the constantly changing perspective of new teachers facing the challenges and difficulties of teaching in the 21st century. In so doing, allowance for a more complete and contextual understanding of the situation and possibly a new and
improved methodology for assimilation of new teachers into Iowa urban schools and school districts.

This proposed study would be designed to contribute to studies and research already conducted on new teacher retention. While other studies have identified the number of new teachers leaving and the impact this has on school districts, this study will attempt to articulate how school systems can assist quality new teachers to prevail.