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# Why Teachers Stay: Elementary Teachers Share Perceptions of the Job Since Legislative Reforms in Wisconsin

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WHY TEACHERS STAY: ELEMENTARY TEACHERS SHARE PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE JOB SINCE LEGISLATIVE REFORMS IN WISCONSIN

by

Catherine M. Clarksen

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
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Doctor of Philosophy  
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at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

December 2014

## ABSTRACT

### WHY TEACHERS STAY: ELEMENTARY TEACHERS SHARE PERCEPTIONS OF THE JOB SINCE LEGISLATIVE REFORMS IN WISCONSIN

by

Catherine M. Clarksen

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014  
Under the Supervision of Dr. Leigh Wallace and Dr. Latish Reed

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of elementary public school classroom teachers who remain in the teaching profession amidst legislative reforms that impacted their wages, benefits and working conditions. The study involved ten teachers who were perceived by their building principals as having a direct impact on positive student achievement. Additionally, each participant was required to have taught for a minimum of five years. Requiring a minimum of five years of teaching increased the likelihood that the teachers had developed a level of expertise and were considered professional educators by Wisconsin DPI.

A basic qualitative study approach provided teachers a venue in which to share their lived experiences as teachers. The study analysis revealed three significant themes, as well as thirteen supporting sub-themes. The primary themes were: teacher attributes, professional challenges and organizational culture. Within the theme of teacher attributes were the sub-themes of drawn to children, passion, positivity, routines and structure, and concern for new teachers. The theme of professional challenges included time needed to meet demands of the job, pace of change, political realities, public perception, and

curiosity about other careers as sub-themes. The final theme, organizational culture, included the influences of colleagues, principals, and district-level leadership.

The study revealed that job satisfaction guided by intrinsic factors matters more than extrinsic factors. However, as districts modify compensation plans teachers do desire to be treated fairly and have working conditions that allow time to prepare for their day-to-day responsibilities without high levels of stress on themselves and their families. Additionally, the study identified a high level of concern for public perception of their profession. As a result, teachers need to consider taking an active role advocating for their profession and the day-to-day realities teachers face. As teachers are internalizing the public perceptions it is important for them to communicate with the community the realities teachers face rather than having the union be the voice for all teachers. Finally, districts incur significant costs when hiring and training teachers. The study revealed attributes consistent among teachers who are remaining in the profession. It is recommended that when hiring teachers, district personnel consider developing an interview experience that evaluates the teacher attributes revealed in the study.

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## DEDICATION

To my best friend, DeAnn, whose consistent support and encouragement, made it possible to complete this journey.

To my parents, Sandy and Marv, who taught me persistence, a never-say-never work ethic and simply to be proud of who I am.

To my brothers, Bruce, Brian, Kevin and Matt who unknowingly were my greatest role models and teachers.

To my grandparents who taught me so many life lessons by simply just being themselves.

To the many coaches both professional and athletic that taught me to believe in myself, that life is not easy, and success requires hard work.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION TO STUDY**

The United States has entered into a new era of education policy. According to King Jr., Burton and Maher (2011), protests occurred in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Indiana related to collective bargaining and fifteen states were weighing laws designed to diminish collective bargaining rights of public-employee unions, including teachers' unions. The state legislators enacted the collective bargaining changes to relieve state budgetary pressures and provide school districts more flexibility in how they determine wages, benefits and working conditions. Along with the changes to collective bargaining, teachers are now evaluated based on their professional practices and student outcomes. At the federal level, beginning with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 and continuing through the Obama administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) competitions for federal funding, the Department of Education has emphasized reforms linking measures of teacher effectiveness to standardized test results and making federal funding contingent on the introduction of teacher-accountability systems. States receiving NCLB waivers committed to including student achievement, usually measured by performance on standardized tests and student learning outcomes, as significant factors in teacher evaluations. According to a report published by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) (2013), in 2009 only four states required teachers to be evaluated, in part, on evidence that their students were learning. By 2013, forty states and the District of Columbia required that student achievement measures be included in teacher evaluations.

Wisconsin, for many, became a state that exemplified these reform trends. Two recent pieces of legislation, Wisconsin's 2011 Act 10 and Wisconsin's 2011 Act 166,

significantly changed the education landscape in the state. Wisconsin 2011 Act 10, enacted March 11, 2011, ended collective bargaining for public-school employees, mandated a pension contribution that equaled 5.8% of salary in 2011, and allowed districts to collect higher contributions from employees for health care costs (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2011, “Summary of Provisions”). 2011 Act 166, enacted April 2, 2012, required, among other provisions, that all students in kindergarten through second grade be screened for reading readiness, and that a new evaluation system be put in place by 2014-2015 for public school teachers and principals (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2012, “Wisconsin Act 166”). The new evaluation system requires that 50% of the total evaluation score assigned to a teacher be based on measures of student performance. The other 50% must be based on the extent to which the teacher’s practice meets the core teaching standards adopted by the 2011 Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). According to official literature, InTASC promotes reform of the preparation, licensing, and professional development of teachers (Wisconsin Legislative Council, 2012).

Additionally, on July 6, 2012, Wisconsin was granted flexibility regarding the NCLB mandates from the federal government. The waiver required Wisconsin to prepare for the implementation of the following educational reforms: a) college and career ready, b) state-developed differentiated recognition, accountability and support, c) effective instruction and leadership and d) reduced duplication and unnecessary burden to district operations (Wisconsin DPI, 2012, “Accountability Reform Overview”). (See figure 1). The approval of the waiver, and the conditions under which it was granted, set

the stage for a great deal of transformation to occur in the education system by the 2014-2015 school year.

Figure 1: *Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Accountability Reform Overview*

<p><b>College &amp; Career Ready Expectations for All Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards and Assessments</li> <li>• Graduation Requirements</li> </ul>	<p><b>Differentiated Recognition, Accountability &amp; Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statewide Accountability System</li> <li>• Annual Measurable Outcomes</li> <li>• School Recognition and Rewards</li> </ul>
<p><b>Effective Instruction &amp; Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All public school teachers/principals evaluated</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reduced Duplication &amp; Unnecessary Burden</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statewide Student Information System</li> <li>• Single Reporting System</li> <li>• Consolidated Reporting Requirements</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Adapted from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2012). *Accountability reform overview*. <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov/files/ee/pdf/ESEAWaiversummary.pdf>

As part of meeting the conditions for its waiver, Wisconsin adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a bipartisan effort to introduce more rigor into classroom curricula and correct one of the flaws in the NCLB Act of 2001 which allowed states to set their own bar for proficiency, and implemented a state report card that publicly shares how each school performs in areas relevant to student achievement. The state is also preparing to test students using the SmarterBalanced Assessment System in the 2014-2015 school year.

Even though Wisconsin is one of forty-three states that adopted the CCSS, resistance required further review by the state legislature. The supporters of the Common Core argued that the standards provided “a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). Opponents argued that it was a one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum, and disagreed with some of the content requirements contained in the Common Core standards.

Vocal opposition for the adoption of the CCSS is present throughout the United States. In Wisconsin, the opposition resulted in the state Senate and Assembly convening special committees in 2013 to hold public hearings and make recommendations. Currently, legislators are seeking to have state standards reviewed every six years by a task force. The state's educational leaders have not welcomed this solution. Sheila Briggs, the Assistant State Superintendent of Education, said, "Revising academic standards every six years would create legal, technical and other issues that make a Republican-backed proposal to do that unworkable" (Bauer, 2014). Although reviewed at the Education Committee level, a formalized bill has not been presented to either house of legislators at this time.

As teachers worked to adapt their classroom materials to meet CCSS, the Wisconsin legislature requested further review of the standards and implementation policy in the passing of the 2013-2015 budget. The ongoing debate only injected more uncertainty into teachers' professional lives. Districts have invested professional development time to train teachers and teachers have worked to align day-to-day lessons with CCSS. At the present time, the CCSS remain.

These reforms brought significant change to the professional world of public school teachers. The provisions of Act 10 reduced teachers' take-home pay; provisions of Act 166 appeared to threaten teacher autonomy in the classroom by tying student outcomes to teacher effectiveness; and Act 20 challenged the work teachers had already done to improve their instruction to meet the CCSS. These reforms were coupled with a significant reduction in Wisconsin's state government's financial support for public schools.

Full funding was not restored in either the 2011-13 budget or the 2013-15 budget. Initially the legislative recommendations for 2011-13 biennial budget required each school district to reduce its revenue limit per pupil by 5.5 percent in year one and not increase its per pupil revenues above the amount it received in 2011-12 school year (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2011, “2011 Assembly Bill 40”). Prior to the governor signing the budget, the Joint Finance Committee reviewed the budget and recommended a \$50 per pupil adjustment under revenue limits for year two of the budget. The full legislature agreed with the recommendation and the 2012-2013 budget included a \$50 per pupil adjustment (Wisconsin DPI, 2011, “Summary of 2011”; Wisconsin State Legislature, 2011, “Executive Partial Veto”). Additionally, Governor Walker recommended no increase in the pupil revenue limit for the 2013-15 biennial budget. However, the legislature passed the Joint Finance Committee recommendation, providing a \$75 per-pupil revenue limit increase for 2013-14 and an additional \$75 per-pupil revenue limit for 2014-2015 (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2013; Wisconsin DPI, 2013, “Summary of 2013”). The 2011-2013 state budget resulted in a cut of \$749 million to general school aid and a reduction of \$1.6 billion in the per pupil revenue limit.

The significant budget cuts accelerated the staffing cuts, resulting in 311 of 424 school districts cutting a total of 1,446 teachers. Statewide, the 1,446 lost teaching positions represent a 75 percent increase in the annual loss to teaching staff over the prior year. Additionally, 5,000 teachers retired before the 2011-12 school year, which was twice the normal rate (Wisconsin DPI, 2012, “Official report shows”). As shown in Table 1, Wisconsin’s per pupil funding decreased between 2009 and 2015. The long-term impact is still being reviewed as districts responded to the budget cuts and union



limits differently based on whether they had long-term labor contracts in place at the time of the legislative changes.

Table 1: *Wisconsin's Per Pupil Revenue Limit Adjustment*

Year	Per Pupil Revenue Limit Adjustment
2009-2010	\$200
2010-2011	\$200
2011-2012	-\$528.81
2012-2013	\$50.00
2013-2014	\$75.00
2014-2015	\$75.00

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2013). "Revenue limit per pupil adjustment and low revenue ceiling amounts" n.d. [http://sfs.dpi.wi.gov/sfs\\_buddev\\_est](http://sfs.dpi.wi.gov/sfs_buddev_est)

It appeared to many that education was under attack in Wisconsin. This perception was heightened by the heated rhetoric and intense political controversy that accompanied passage of Acts 10 and 166. During the debate over Act 10, the Democrats in the State Senate fled the state in order to deny the majority of Republicans the quorum necessary to pass the measure. Educators from across the state descended onto the grounds of the State Capitol in Madison to protest during the legislative proceedings and make clear their opposition to the new law. Despite the maneuvers, however, Republicans passed the bills and moved them to the governor's desk, where he signed them into law (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2012, "Summary of provisions of 2011 Act 10"). Court challenges followed, and Act 10 is currently before the Wisconsin Supreme Court, with a decision expected in the summer of 2014 (Marley, 2013; Novak, 2014).

In the wake of changes to collective bargaining, increased teacher accountability and the adoption of the CCSS, questions of teacher motivation have risen to the fore. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) contend that the root of teacher shortage largely resides in the working conditions within schools and districts. This study focused on why elementary teachers remain in the profession amidst legislative reforms that impact their wages, benefits and working conditions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The political and legal maneuvering that surrounded the passage of Act 10, Act 166 and Act 20 provided the historical context for this study. The purpose of this research study was to describe teacher perceptions of this new era in Wisconsin education. The central question was why, amidst legislative reforms that impacted their wages, benefits and working conditions, would experienced elementary-level teachers remain in the classroom? In order to investigate why teachers remain in the profession the study was built around three questions:

1. What factors contribute to teachers remaining in the profession?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of the changes to their personal and professional lives?
3. How do teachers perceive the profession post 2010 legislative reforms?

### **Significance of the Study**

Ultimately, all federal and state educational reforms are implemented at the local school district level. If the stated intentions of these reforms, providing every student with an effective teacher in an effective learning environment in a cost-effective way, are to be realized, much depends on how local schools operationalize the new requirements

and how classroom teachers perceive their role and their work environment. In particular, elementary-level teachers are charged with laying the groundwork for what Dorn and Soffos (2012) term “a literate populace—a culture of learners who understand how to solve problems, seek solutions, communicate effectively, and construct meaning” (p. 2). It is especially important to know how teachers perceive their jobs and why they elect to continue in them. In addition, school administrators need to know how to retain the quality teachers they have trained and recruit teachers who will succeed in this new era of metrics-based assessments of teacher effectiveness.

This study is particularly relevant in light of recent data on teacher retirements and on the number of teachers not of retirement age leaving the profession. Statistics from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) showed that “an estimated 157,000 men and women leave the field of education every year and 232,000 change schools in the pursuit of better working conditions” (p. 1). According to Foster (2010), new teacher attrition rates have been rising steadily for more than a decade. By some estimates more than a third of the nation’s teachers leave the profession within three years; and in some school districts, half of the new hires are replaced every five years. As greater accountability measures are placed on teachers, strategies for retaining teachers are important.

In addition, recent data has shown that legislative decisions like those in Wisconsin motivated a greater number of teachers to retire. The Beloit School District, for example, expected a large number of teachers to retire due to Act 10 (Gavan, 2013). Similarly, in New Jersey nearly 6,500 school employees filed for retirement in 2010. That was almost double the number from 2009. The drastic increase was the result of a

legislative proposal to charge for post-retirement health insurance and to change the way pensions were calculated (Associated Press, 2010).

The quickened pace of teacher attrition, whether through job changes or retirement, have an impact on school budgets and on education quality. An issue brief prepared by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) cited estimates by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) that the cumulative costs for schools nationwide to hire, recruit, and train replacement teachers totaled a staggering \$7.34 billion. Perhaps even more important is the impact on students. Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2013) found that teacher turnover had a significant and negative impact on student achievement in both math and English language arts, negatively affected collegiality and trust among faculty members and resulted in loss of institutional knowledge among faculty that is critical for supporting student learning. Thus part of the significance of this study resided in its identification of the traits that marked motivated teachers who were committed to staying in the classroom under the new reforms.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

Using qualitative methods, the study sought "to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Through in-depth interviews with selected Wisconsin elementary-school teachers, the researcher sought to understand and interpret the experiences of each participant.

The participants were selected through purposeful sampling. Once the elementary building principals submitted potential participants, a random sampling strategy was employed and four names were selected from each school and contacted. Ultimately,

eight teachers agreed to participate in the study. During the interviews with each participant, the researcher also requested names of other teachers whom the research participants themselves believed might provide additional insights. This snowball sampling technique resulted in two additional teachers joining the study. Research questions were developed to gain insights into teacher perceptions regarding motivating factors, as well as challenges in their job environment. The qualitative study resulted in the researcher transcribing the interviews, coding the data to discover common themes, and interpreting and analyzing the data resulting in key research findings.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used to provide background related to the study:

*Wisconsin's 2011 ACT 10* was enacted March 11, 2011. Act 10 resulted in the ending of collective bargaining for public school employees in the state of Wisconsin, mandating a pension contribution that equaled 5.8% of salary in 2011 and allowing districts to collect higher contributions from employees for health care costs (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2011, "Summary of Provisions").

*Wisconsin's 2011 Act 166* was enacted April 2, 2012. Act 166 made several changes to Wisconsin elementary and secondary education laws with the aim of improving educator effectiveness and student performance. Act 166 does the following: Creates the Read to Lead Development Council, a bipartisan team of teachers, legislators, researchers and advocates working to ensure all Wisconsin children learn to read; creates the Governor's Read to Lead Development Fund to provide grants to school boards and other persons in support of literacy and early childhood development programs; requires

that kindergarten-second grade pupils be screened for reading readiness; requires evaluation of teacher preparation programs; provides for evaluation of educator effectiveness and creates new requirements for specified teacher licenses (Wisconsin Legislative Council, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

Legislative reforms at the national, state and local level have focused on reducing educational funding costs and increasing teaching accountability. As a result, education professionals have experienced pay freezes, increased contributions for health insurance, increased contributions for the state retirement system, a call for higher standards, and a new evaluation system that rates both teacher practices and student outcomes. This study sought to uncover why Wisconsin elementary classroom teachers are staying in education after the recent legislative reforms that impacted their wages, benefits and working conditions.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This study sought to describe and understand why experienced elementary-level teachers in Wisconsin chose to remain in the teaching profession following a series of legislative reforms that impacted their conditions of employment. In order to understand the work environment of today's teachers it is important to understand the research literature regarding Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) policy development as well as the development of the theoretical literature regarding job satisfaction and teacher motivation.

#### **ESEA Brings Awareness to Teacher Development**

Although education in the United States is primarily a matter of state and local responsibility, federal legislation has influenced the evolution of public education. Prior to 1965 the Federal Government's involvement with public education focused on providing dollars to support buildings and teacher salaries. However, in 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson worked with Congress to pass the first version of ESEA, calling for educational accountability measures. Federal education funding was to improve specific areas of concern: equal access, high standards, accountability and achievement gaps. Both elementary and secondary level schools received funds to help children overcome the effects of poverty as it related to learning. ESEA also provided money to state education agencies to support a variety of purposes including improving quality teacher preparation and developing statewide measures of pupil educational attainment and training (Alford, 1965). Furthermore, teacher quality was subtly brought into the conversation as the ESEA bill was being considered. According to Keppel (as cited in

Cross, 2004), Senator Robert F. Kennedy said, “Look, I want to change this bill because it doesn’t have any way of measuring those damned educators like you, Frank, and we really ought to have some evaluation in there, and some measurement as to whether any good is happening” (p. 29). Prior to this statement not much thought was given on how to assess what teachers had done (Cross, 2004). Over time the reauthorization of ESEA provided the framework for federal education policy and greater student and teacher accountability.

Although President Nixon resigned without reauthorizing ESEA, Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan all reauthorized ESEA during their tenures. President Ford went on to reauthorize ESEA and increase funding. In 1977 he also worked with Congress to pass the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This act drastically increased the federal government’s commitment to categorical aid (U. S. Department of Education, 2006). President Carter, with the support of Congress, created the cabinet-level Department of Education. Carter believed restructuring the federal government’s organizational structure relative to education would eliminate bureaucratic layers. The Department of Education allowed the federal government to be more efficient, and responsive as it related to educational decision-making (Carter, 1979). Even though Carter’s creation of the U. S. Department of Education did not immediately have a substantive impact on the federal role, it did set the stage for placing education more at the center of national concerns and policy and for what would be a substantial expansion of the federal role in later years. When President Reagan won the 1980 presidential contest he worked with Congress to cut federal aid to education. Reagan believed that



education was a state responsibility. His reauthorization of ESEA resulted in a new act, the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA). States that received federal dollars could decide how to spend them. Reagan believed that the job of the federal government was to assist state and local agencies to improve elementary and secondary education (New York State Education Department, 2006). Additionally, Reagan's administration produced a report called *A Nation At Risk*. One of the six reforms called for action to support good teaching. Teachers were to be paid and promoted on the basis of their competence and merit (Cross, 2004). The issue of quality teachers would continue to gain traction in the coming years. During Reagan's tenure as president his secretary of education, William Bennett, appointed a commission headed by Lamar Alexander and J. Thomas James to examine the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data and make recommendations. The NAEP data provided a national and regional picture of student achievement data. As a result of the review, NAEP data were presented state by state. This provided the federal government another resource when reviewing education policy. The introduction of data on student achievement also started conversations about how else the data could be used (Cross, 2004). Although the approach to education policy differed based on the leadership, Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan reauthorized ESEA, supporting the original emphasis of equal access to education and the establishment of high standards and accountability. Future presidential campaigns would go on to include education as a critical campaign topic. The focus on education can be seen in the education platforms used by presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama.

When George H. W. Bush took over as president in 1989 he declared his intention to be an “education president.” In his 1990 State of the Union address, he announced education goals that were to be reached by 2000. America 2000 called for a graduation rate of no less than 90 percent, standardized testing in critical subjects for all students in grades 4, 8, and 12, the expectations that all U. S. students would be first in the world in math and science achievement and a push for aligned curriculum, standards, assessment, teacher training and resources (Bush, 1990). Although testing was mandated, the graduation rate did not reach 90 percent nor did U. S. students attain first in the world status in science and math. Government leaders were beginning to make the connection between assessing students and developing quality teachers.

Prior to becoming president, as governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton was a key contributor to America 2000. When he was elected president in 1993 he moved his education agenda forward by enacting Goals 2000. Goals 2000 called for implementing higher standards and accountability, improving student performance, closing the achievement gap, expanding access to technology, and making higher education more affordable. President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore’s commitment to invest more in education while also demanding more from schools and ultimately from teachers led to remarkable progress (The Clinton-Gore Administration, 2000). President George H.W. Bush, President Clinton and the Congressional leaders during President Bush’s and President Clinton’s tenure continued to seek accountability. The influence of teacher preparation and quality had entered into federal education policy, however it was George W. Bush’s reauthorization of ESEA that generated greater focus on teacher effectiveness.

George W. Bush took over as president after Bill Clinton and extended the work

of the Clinton administration. President Bush reauthorized ESEA by passing the most significant educational policy since the inception of ESEA. Congress passed President Bush's ESEA reauthorization in 2001. Bush's education policy was called No Child Left Behind (NCLB). According to a Washington Post summary, four guiding principles summarized NCLB. These included increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools; more flexibility for States and local educational agencies (LEAs) in the use of Federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for the youngest children ("The No Child", 2002). Although the federal government provided funding for NCLB Act as the original ESEA framework required, the funding was not enough to cover the additional costs necessary to comply with the law.

The increased accountability criteria of the NCLB legislation called for a highly qualified teacher in every public school classroom. To meet this standard, the law required teachers to have full state certification or pass the state teacher-licensing exam, and not be teaching under temporary, emergency, or provisional credentials or any kind of certification waiver. Elementary teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree and pass a rigorous state subject knowledge and teaching skills exam in reading, writing, math, and other areas of the state's basic elementary curriculum (Lohman, 2010). Each state was responsible for identifying the highly qualified criteria for teachers not new to the profession.

Even though there were many similarities between President Bush's reform efforts and those of the presidents who came before him, there was one significant difference. NCLB required that all students be proficient, regardless of the challenges

faced by individual students, in math and literacy by 2014. Additionally, it required that schools demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward that goal each year. AYP required continuous and substantial yearly improvement of each school receiving Title I funds. The improvement was to lead to all students meeting the state's proficient and advanced levels of performance by the year 2013-2014. The mandate resulted in the following unintended consequences: incentives for states to lower their standards; an emphasis on punishing failure over rewarding success; a focus on absolute scores, rather than recognizing growth and progress; and a prescribed pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools that missed their goals (Finnigan & Gross, 2007). NCLB created a pressure at the school level that had never before been experienced. According to Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, and Harrington (2014), teachers worked more hours as a result of increased task demands and felt an increased level of anxiety about the possibility of losing their jobs. However, the teachers appreciated a higher level of classroom autonomy and increased support from colleagues, administrators and parents after the implementation of NCLB. Ultimately, the study revealed teacher satisfaction was higher in the years since the passage of NCLB. Teachers overwhelmingly supported the defining principle of NCLB legislation, quality education for all children; however, the teachers were critical regarding the pressures to meet AYP in schools with a significant population of disadvantaged students (Murnane & Papay, 2010).

The unintended consequences of NCLB generated strong concern nationally and resulted in immediate action when Barack Obama became president. Currently, the Obama administration has yet to reauthorize ESEA. As reauthorization of ESEA continues to be stalled in Congress, The Obama administration moved its education

agenda forward by offering more flexibility to states in meeting the mandated AYP goals under NCLB and fostering innovation in schools through the Race To The Top (RTTT) grant program. In 2009 the competitive federal grants were instituted by the United States Department of Education to encourage innovation and reform. President Obama's education agenda called for continued standardized testing and set the stage for:

(a) Higher standards and better assessments that will prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace. (b) Ambitious efforts to recruit, prepare, develop, and advance effective teachers and principals, especially in the classrooms where they are most needed. (c) Smarter data systems to measure student growth and success, and help educators improve instruction. (d) New attention and a national effort to turn around our lowest-achieving schools. (The White House, 2012, para. 2)

The U. S. Department of Education continues to stay the course regarding increased teacher and principal accountability. Once fair, rigorous evaluations for teachers and principals are in place, the evaluations can help connecting educator performance with differentiated professional development, compensation, and career advancement (The White House, 2012). States that made the connection between educator performance and student outcomes scored higher in the grant review. As a condition of applying for the RTTT grant, the U.S. Department of Education required that the state have no legal, statutory, or regulatory barriers at the state level to linking data on student achievement to individual teachers and principals for the purposes of evaluation (Lohman, 2010). This presented an immediate challenge for Wisconsin as teachers had language in their contracts prohibiting the use of student achievement data being considered in the

evaluation process. As a result of 2011 Act 166, the legislature required the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to develop an educator effectiveness system that included 50% of the evaluation of teachers and principals to be based on student outcomes (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2012, “Wisconsin Act 166”). Reporting student data that identifies the teacher’s responsibility for instruction raises the level of scrutiny and accountability the teacher experiences.

Seen in historical context, the general trend of education reform at the federal level becomes clear. Initially, the Federal Government’s involvement included the building of schools and salaries of teachers. Over time, regardless of the political party of the president, the Federal Government has consistently pushed for educational equity. Initially the equity issues focused on students who faced socioeconomic disadvantage, discrimination, and language barriers. In recent years federal education funding became linked to raising the effectiveness of education for all students (New York State Education Department, 2006). At the state and local level tighter linkages between measures of student performance and measures of educator effectiveness and better methodologies for improving school and teacher performance are taking precedent. In order to secure federal education funding, Race to the Top (RTTT) dollars, states were required to link educator evaluations to student outcomes. Over time the evolution of federal legislation included a funding commitment for buildings, education programs, standards and assessment, teacher professional development, teacher quality, and currently teacher effectiveness. Future research will demonstrate how the changes due to RTTT impacts teacher job satisfaction.

### **Teacher Retention Considerations: Job Satisfaction and Motivation**

The role of teacher motivation in the workplace has not received a significant amount of research attention. Current research focuses on teacher effectiveness, which is linked to instructional strategies, state standards and a teacher's professional practices. In fact, the current national education agenda ties federal funding to the adoption of CCSS and an approved teacher effectiveness model. As the federal education agenda continues to change the work environment of teachers, further research is needed to investigate teacher retention under these arguably more challenging working conditions. Education reform policies could end up increasing, either intentionally or unintentionally, factors that lead to dissatisfaction within the teaching profession. "If turnover is at the root of school staffing problems and if the quality of the teaching job is a large factor behind turnover, then policies that further erode the low status of teaching, that undermine salary increases, or that undermine working conditions may simply backfire by increasing turnover" (Ingersoll, 2003, p.18).

Indeed, the changes to collective bargaining and teacher compensation may already be showing up in numbers that indicate fewer people are entering the teaching profession in Wisconsin. The teacher preparation programs in the University of Wisconsin System have seen a decrease in junior and senior undergraduates enrolled in state teacher-training programs since 2010. The numbers do not include students seeking teaching licenses with majors not classified by the UW System as education majors. The *Wisconsin State Journal* reported a 2.8% decrease between 2010 and 2012 at University of Wisconsin System campuses. In the preceding two years, by contrast, there was a 6.8 percent increase in potential teaching candidates (Beck, 2013). The state of Wisconsin

has about 1,500 fewer teachers in public schools than before state lawmakers approved Act 10. DPI spokesman John Johnson stated, “Student enrollment, over the last five years, has gone down by three-tenths of a percent. That’s about 3000 kids, but we’ve lost about 3000 teachers in the same time period. That’s almost a teacher per kid. Ultimately, there are about 5,000 fewer full-time positions than there were five years ago” (Beck, 2013, para. 17). Fewer college graduates choosing the teaching profession could further challenge the goal of highly qualified teachers educating the students of today and the future.

The NCLB Act of 2001 identified the need for a qualified teacher in every classroom. Education decisions and policies at the local, state and national levels continue to emphasize the need for highly qualified teachers. However, if these efforts are to be successful, policy makers will need to focus not just on teacher recruitment, but on retaining teachers once they begin their careers since about 13% of the 3.4 million public school teachers either move or leave the profession each year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Teacher recruitment programs traditionally found in policy will not solve staffing problems if the programs do not also address the organizational sources of low teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2003). Each time a teacher decides to move or leave the profession a school district incurs expenses. Across the United States a total of between \$1 billion and \$2.2 billion a year is spent on teacher attrition turnover. In Wisconsin the estimated cost of public school teacher attrition is between \$17,600,00 and \$38,300,000 (Alliance for Educational Excellence, 2014). The costs result in resources that could be used to further develop student learning and training for current staff being



spent on the hiring and training of new staff members in an effort to ensure that new staff members develop skills at least equal to the staff members who have resigned or retired.

Teacher turnover rates are alarming. Nationally, between 30 and 50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003). Ingersoll (2003) showed that too many teachers are leaving for reasons other than retirement. From an organizational viewpoint, leaders must ensure working conditions that are meaningful to the teachers that stay or face the instability and additional costs that result when teachers leave. According to Perrachione, Rosser and Petersen (2008), there are different factors that exist regarding the teaching profession and the job of teaching resulting in negative extrinsic factors generating roadblocks to otherwise satisfied teachers. In other words, people may be attracted to the idea of teaching but dissatisfied by the reality of teaching. Figure 2 demonstrates research findings related to what creates teacher satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the profession versus satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the job of teaching. This research study was prior to states making collective bargaining changes in 2011. Future research findings may also recognize the impact of legislative actions.

*Figure 2: Satisfaction with Profession Versus Satisfaction with the Job of Teaching*

<p><b>Satisfaction with the Profession</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with students</li> <li>• Personal teacher efficacy</li> <li>• Job satisfaction</li> </ul>	<p><b>Satisfaction with the Job of Teaching</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good students</li> <li>• Positive school environment</li> <li>• Small class sizes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dissatisfaction with the Profession</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role overload</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dissatisfaction with the Job of Teaching</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role overload</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salary</li> <li>• Parent support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student behavior</li> <li>• Large class size</li> </ul>
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Figure 2: Adapted from Perrachione, Rosser & Petersen, 2008; Bobbitt, Faupel & Burns, 1991; Meek, 1998

As states implement CCSS, teacher effectiveness models, and state report cards, consideration for how the new requirements will impact teacher satisfaction will need to be considered. Providing teachers greater autonomy, influence, and administrative support may help reduce attrition (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001).

Even as state and federal education policies erode some of the intrinsic rewards of teaching, other policies can bolster a different set of intrinsic rewards. Mentoring and support from more senior teachers may create a feeling of community and teamwork that binds a new teacher to the profession. The relative attractiveness of teaching involves the excitement that stems from teaching, both extrinsic and intrinsic, with the rewards of other possible activities that could be pursued (Guarino, et al., 2006).

Motivation theorists distinguish between extrinsic motivation, things like wages, benefits, working conditions, labor/management relations, etc., and intrinsic motivation, personal fulfillment, autonomy and creativity. Teachers most often leave college intrinsically motivated to impact the lives of children, not extrinsically motivated by money. According to Farkas, Johnson and Foleno (2000), 83% of teachers felt that it was essential that the job involved work that they loved to do. Additionally, 72% said that the job must contribute to society and help others. The teaching profession is not a high-end profession as it relates to financial gain, but is highly rewarding because it provides personal satisfaction. Intrinsically motivated workers do not simply go through the motions of doing good enough work, instead, workers are engaged in their work when they are committed to a purpose, using their intelligence to make choices about how to

best accomplish the task, monitoring their behavior to make sure they are doing the task well, checking to make sure their actions are actually accomplishing the purpose and taking corrective action when needed (Thomas, 2009).

The distinctions made by Thomas and other motivation researchers between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation parallel happiness research. Happiness is a biological, social, and psychological phenomenon within a person that affects both intrinsic and extrinsic human motivation (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009). Writing specifically of teachers, these researchers found that happiness emerged from teachers in those moments when they were fully engaged in meaningful activities with students. Teachers believed what they were doing represented their best teaching, resulting in a sense of personal pride and inspiration.

Young teachers are often inspired to become teachers due to their desire to make a difference. According to Manuel and Hughes (2006), 71% of pre-service teachers chose to teach for personal fulfillment reasons. Additionally, 66% of the pre-service teachers shared that they liked working with young people. The opportunity to develop a relationship with a child and to guide the child's learning inspires many teachers. Today, however, there is concern that a teacher's approach to student growth will be less nurturing and more regimented due to increased accountability and standardized tests. Indeed, it could be argued that today's education agenda is endangering teacher happiness, which is derived from intrinsic rewards they receive when teaching. Happiness, job satisfaction, and motivation occur when work is found intrinsically rewarding, morally upstanding, purposeful, appropriately challenging, and fully supportive of the learning and development of the people involved (Bullough &

Pinnegar, 2009). The literature has also shown that satisfaction guided by intrinsic factors is influenced directly by the characteristics of the job and the extent to which motivational characteristics match what people value and is expected of them on the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Perrachione et al., 2008). Ultimately, school districts would be well served to monitor the satisfaction of the teachers who are staying in the profession.

Although there is not a substantial amount of research regarding teacher satisfaction, industrial psychologists have made significant contributions to the study of satisfaction (Lawler, 1970). Research studies have consistently found relationships between satisfaction and absenteeism and turnover (Brayfield & Crockett, 1965; Herzberg, 1987; Schuh, 1967; Vroom, 1964). According to the expectancy theory, a person's motivation to attend his/her job is strongly influenced by the relative attractiveness of attending the job. The person who is dissatisfied with his/her job is likely to see attending his/her job as less intrinsically motivating than is the person who is satisfied with his/her job. Because of this, the dissatisfied person is likely to come to work less often. Structuring a work environment so that effective performance would lead to both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards would produce total job satisfaction (Lawler, 1970; Vroom, 1964). Research repeatedly demonstrated that job satisfaction results in higher level of teacher retention and as satisfaction decreases, teacher attrition and absenteeism were shown to increase (Bobbitt et al., 1991; McLaughlin, Pfeifer, Swanson-Owens & Yee, 1986). Specific teaching responsibilities, such as planning and preparation, create stress. Liu and Ramsey (2008) found that stress from poor working conditions had the largest influence on teachers' job satisfaction and noted that

inadequate time for planning and preparation and a heavy teaching workload reduced satisfaction from teaching. Teaching has been listed among the high-stress professions, with as many as one-quarter of teachers reporting that teaching is a very stressful job (Kyriacoa, 2001). It is not unreasonable to ascertain that the job of teaching is stressful, however, if newly created expectations result in excessive demands a natural inclination would be for the job to be less desirable.

Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards elicit different responses from employees.

Extrinsic rewards like pay are given by someone else and for this reason they might not be given in close accord with the person's performance. In situations where the good performing employees are rewarded the same as poor performing employees, a negative relationship should exist between satisfaction and performance because the better performers will be experiencing the same level of rewards as the poor performers, but will feel they should be rewarded more highly (Lawler, 1970; Vroom, 1964). Intrinsic rewards are closely tied to performance as the reward is given directly from the person him/herself when he/she performs well. Jobs that provide the employee low control, that are not challenging, and that provide little feedback, would not be intrinsically motivating (Lawler, 1970). As school districts around the nation refine evaluation practices and compensation policies consideration for performance appears to be justified.

Regular monitoring of satisfaction allows organizations to measure the impact of their reward policies and to predict the levels of absenteeism and turnover that are likely in the future. Employers should find the higher the satisfaction the less the absenteeism and turnover. Economically it pays to have a general high satisfaction level since turnover and absenteeism are very costly (Lawler, 1970). With teacher retention rates as

high as 50% implementing practices that improve job satisfaction and personal motivation may be beneficial.

### **Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivating Factors**

A significant amount of psychological research has been done on the factors involved in human motivation. Over time, different theorists have emphasized varying aspects of the research, leading to distinctions between motivational theories. Four theories have been identified with potential connections to teacher motivation since the enactment of educational reforms related to collective bargaining, educator effectiveness and the implementation of CCSS. The theories examine the intrinsic motivational factors surrounding self-determination, self-efficacy, and mastery orientation as well as the extrinsic factors that contribute to human motivation.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT) is credited with the emergence of a conceptual understanding of motivation. SDT involves the investigation of people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality, as well as for the conditions that foster those positive processes (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The evolution of self-determination theory can be traced back to the work of Harlow, Maslow, and Vroom.

Harlow's research with monkeys concluded that primates could complete a task simply for the gratification and/or joy of the task. Harlow (1953) concluded, "Experimental test bears out the fact that learning performance by the monkey is unrelated to the theoretical intensity of the hunger drive" (p. 26). The research involving the study of monkeys and puzzles recognized a motivation beyond food. In fact, Harlow

(1953) found that when the food-rewarded monkeys had solved a puzzle, they abandoned it. When the nonfood-rewarded animals had solved the puzzle, they frequently continued their explorations and manipulations. The research conclusions highlighted the idea that an extrinsic incentive could be a motivation destroyer, as the food-rewarded monkeys did not display any curiosity to further play with the puzzle pieces.

One of Harlow's students, Abraham Maslow, focused his research on humanistic psychology. Maslow's research of the 1950's supported Harlow's conclusions. According to Maslow (1943), human needs arrange themselves in a hierarchy. The appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another need. Maslow's research led him to develop a hierarchy of basic needs: physiological needs (food, shelter, etc.), the need for safety, the need for love, the need for esteem, and the need for self-actualization. When a need was fairly well satisfied, the next higher need would surface. Satisfied needs were not motivators. Rather, unsatisfied needs drove people. "A healthy person is primarily motivated by his/her need to develop and actualize his/her fullest potential" (Maslow, 1943, p. 394). In terms of workplace motivation for teachers, one could argue that Maslow's physiological and safety needs, the lowest on the hierarchy, are closely related to extrinsic factors, like pay and workplace conditions. The higher levels on the hierarchy are related to intrinsic factors, like working with students and personal growth.

Ryan and Deci (2000), further qualified the power of intrinsic rewards when they revealed their research linking human motivation to the cognitive evaluation theory (CET). Extrinsic rewards were believed to undermine intrinsic motivation. According to Gagne and Deci (2005), the CET lost validation because most studies were laboratory

experiments rather than organizational studies and the theory seemed to imply that managers would have to focus on one or the other—that is, either on promoting intrinsic motivation through participation and empowerment while minimizing the use of extrinsic factors or, alternatively, on using rewards and other extrinsic contingencies to maximize extrinsic motivation while ignoring the importance of intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) held a dynamic view of motivation rejecting this either/or approach. Their view theorized that humans have three innate psychological needs. Those needs are competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When those needs are satisfied, people feel motivated, productive, and happy. This theory confirmed that people have a greater sense of purpose when they enjoy the experience. The science shows that “if-then” rewards not only are ineffective in many situations, but also can crush the high-level, creative abilities that are central to current and future economic and social progress (Pink, 2009).

SDT separates itself from other work motivation theories by distinguishing between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. According to Gagne and Deci (2005), “Autonomy involves acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice. Intrinsic motivation is an example of autonomous motivation. In contrast, being controlled involves acting with a sense of pressure, a sense of having to engage in the actions” (p. 333). As teachers transition to a work environment that requires higher accountability, leaders will need to consider how to blend opportunities of choice with the realities of federal, state, and local requirements.

Intrinsic motivation comes from a desire to accomplish a task for a sense of personal satisfaction and joy, whereas extrinsic motivation comes from the prospect of a



reward given to confirm that the task was accomplished, and personal satisfaction is not necessary. Gagne and Deci (2005) state, “People need to feel competent and autonomous to maintain their intrinsic motivation—and experiments were reviewed that provided support for this proposition” (p. 336). The primary responsibility of a teacher is to create a learning environment that allows students to take risks and learn. The CCSS contribute to teacher competence by providing broad parameters from which teachers develop lessons. However, teachers are provided autonomy as they design the day-to-day lessons that support CCSS.

Self-determination theorists have argued that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an era of intrinsic motivation, and that workplaces that rely solely on extrinsic factors to motivate workers do not thrive. Indeed, Shirky (2010) sees intrinsic motivation at work even in people’s choice of leisure activity. He found that the time Americans once spent watching television has been redirected toward activities that are less about consuming and more about engaging. Social media demonstrates how people are seeking to be more engaged in their free time. New technologies have generated more opportunities for people to have experiences that bring a sense of personal satisfaction. Self-determination theorists believe that the actions of humans can be self-motivating and personally gratifying. In terms of workplace motivation, they emphasize autonomy, the ability to control one’s own work decisions and competency are central factors in motivating employees.

As applied to the Wisconsin teachers in this study, self-determination theory would suggest teachers that stay work in an autonomous environment where growing and competence are valued. According to SDT, autonomous motivation for teaching should be positively associated with feelings of personal accomplishment and negatively

associated with feelings of exhaustion (Roth, Assor, Kaplan and Kanat-Maymon, 2007). A sense of autonomy provides a greater sense of contribution to a person's work (Black & Deci, 2000; Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2009, 2010). Autonomous efforts are accompanied by feelings of vitality and energy that are the opposite of feeling drained and exhausted (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman & Deci, 2000). School administrators can promote teachers' autonomous motivation for teaching by encouraging teachers' participation in major decisions, by delegating authority, by making an effort to gain some understanding of the needs of each teacher, and by fostering an organizational structure and climate that supports teachers' sense of relatedness and competence (Assor & Oplatka, 2003; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon & Kaplan, 2007). Ultimately, inviting teachers into the planning and preparation gives teachers a voice in decision-making.

### **Social-Cognitive Theory**

Social-cognitive theory (SCT) is a complex and multi-dimensional theoretical framework with potential relevance regarding teacher retention. The theory indicates that human achievement is shaped by the intersection of three variables: behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors. Essentially, social cognitive theory explores oneself. In the language of SCT, belief in one's ability to create desired outcomes through autonomous actions is called self-efficacy. The emphasis on self-efficacy grew out of Bandura and Walters' early work on social learning and personality development (1963). According to Pajaras' (2002) summary of the development of the theory, by the 1970's Bandura was becoming aware that a key element was missing. The key element of self-efficacy is the belief that one's actions can produce desired outcomes.

In Wood and Bandura's (1989) formulation, self-efficacy developed through "mastery experiences" (p. 364). In other words, success at a task strengthens belief in one's abilities, although Wood and Bandura (1989) recognized the role setbacks played in teaching the need for sustained effort to accomplish a task. Self-efficacy increases as people actually experience desired outcomes as the result of their actions, or more simply still: success breeds a positive attitude and a positive attitude breeds success (Bandura, 1989; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni & Steca; Pajaras, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998).

A high level of teacher efficacy results in a teacher believing in his or her own ability to influence student learning. (Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). On the other hand, a low level of teacher efficacy results in a teacher blaming other indicators for the lack of quality instruction. Tschannen-Moran et al., (1998) built on this belief when they concluded, "A teacher who is aware of deficits in his or her capabilities in a certain circumstance but has a belief about how those deficits can be addressed will have a resilient sense of teacher efficacy" (p. 233). The development of positive self-efficacy is important to teachers. Once self-efficacy is developed it reinforces their belief that they can have a positive effect on student learning. According to Wolters and Daugherty (2007), elementary school teachers report higher levels of self-efficacy for student engagement than teachers in the middle or high schools. Furthermore, teachers with high levels of self-efficacy for classroom management and instructional strategies reported higher levels of job satisfaction, whereas teachers with high levels of overall stress reported lowered job satisfaction (Caprara, et al., 2003; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Research has found that teacher self-efficacy was positively

related to job satisfaction and negatively related to emotional exhaustion (Avanzi, Miglioretti, Velasco, Balducci, Vecchio, Fraccaroli, & Skaalvik, 2013; Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2010). Teachers were found to have positive attitudes about being controlled themselves through institutional control but negative feelings about controlling their students (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). In order to improve teacher retention rates, efforts to ensure teachers do not deal with an unreasonable amount of stress day in and day out ought to be considered. Creating a collaborative school culture with an effective leader may contribute to easing the stress teachers are feeling.

Teaching has become a more collaborative, group effort in recent years. As a result, individual efficacy and collective efficacy may contribute to higher achieving students. "Social Cognitive Theory acknowledges that 'personal agency' operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences" (Bandura, 1997, p. 6). Thus the theory extends to collective efficacy, that the efforts of the faculty will have an effect on student performance (Bandura, 1997). Organizational members' collective belief about their efficacy in producing and achieving at certain levels is an important feature of the institution's operating culture (Caprara, et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The strength of a common commitment by a collective group, such as teachers, presents a sense of mission and purpose creating an environment where individuals work together to produce results and together face difficulties (Bandura, 1997). Collective efficacy is associated with the tasks, level of effort, persistence, collaboration, stress levels, and achievement of the group (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk, 2000). Additionally, in schools where teachers see their principal as a good leader, great effort is devoted in sharing responsibilities and pursuing common goals, increasing teacher confidence regarding the

system's collective efficacy (Caprara, et al., 2003). It is not enough to hire and retain the brightest teachers. The teachers must also believe they can successfully meet the challenges of the task at hand. When teachers believe they are members of a faculty that is both competent and able to overcome the detrimental effects of the environment, the students in their building have higher achievement scores than students in buildings with lower levels of collective efficacy (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000). Helping principals to understand their level of influence and encouraging them to build positive working relationships with teachers would enhance teacher retention (Hughes, 2012). Social-cognitive theory leads to the conclusion that teachers who stay in the profession have a high sense of both self-efficacy and collective efficacy resulting in better teacher retention and student achievement.

### **Achievement Goal Theory**

Achievement goal theorists investigate how people approach goal attainment. Theorists distinguish between two types of goal orientation, mastery, also referred to as learning, and ability. With a mastery orientation, a person defines competence in terms of how challenging a task is and the degree of prior success. Outcomes are related to the amount of effort it takes to accomplish a task, and challenging tasks are preferred to easy ones. Difficulty is interpreted as a sign that the person needs to learn more, therefore he/she responds by seeking help and information. With an ability orientation, by contrast, a person defines competence relative to others. Outcomes are viewed as indicators of ability, so difficulty is seen as a sign of low ability. Consequently, the person tries to avoid exposing his/her lack of ability by asking for help (Ames & Ames, 1984; Butler, 2007; Dweck, 1986; Elliot, 1988; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006).

Mastery goals are associated with more positive emotional experiences than are performance goals (Ames & Archer, 1988; Kaplan, Middleton, Urdan & Midgley, 2002).

Individuals who approach experiences and tasks from a mastery perspective when faced with obstacles will not retreat from the experience. Additionally, the experience or task will not readily generate a sense of anxiety within the individual. The intrinsic reward of taking on the task and making progress remains within the person (Elliot, 1988). Although there are parallels between how achievement goal theory serves to motivate both students and teachers, it was not until Butler's work that teachers' personal achievement goal orientation for teaching received attention. Goal theory has proven very useful in understanding both students' motivation for schoolwork and teachers' influences on student motivation, yet little attention has been on teachers as professionals who want to succeed at their job.

Mastery orientation for teaching is positively associated with teachers willingly seeking help or advice. Building principals can encourage teacher growth and effort by encouraging a culture of mutual help and support. However, if principals evaluate teachers mainly in terms of student test scores a more competitive school culture based on ability orientation will manifest undermining teachers desire to seek help and/or offer help (Butler, 2007; Retelsdorf & Gunther, 2011).

A mastery goal orientation bears significant linkage to both the SDT idea of autonomy and the SCT idea of efficacy. Teachers who stay in the profession need to believe that they can achieve their desired outcomes, in spite of any difficulties they encounter. As state-mandated evaluation systems yield comparisons among teachers' results, mastery goal orientation becomes an important component of a teacher's

confidence in the ability to improve. A teacher with a mastery goal orientation may be more willing to seek out help to improve his/her instruction. A teacher with an ability goal orientation may seek to disguise low ratings or blame them on external factors, which can lead to insecurity and avoidance, or ego-driven decisions. Achievement goal theory would suggest that Wisconsin teachers might persist in their profession because as they take on new learning they are not afraid to seek the support of their colleagues.

### **Motivation-Hygiene Theory**

Job satisfaction results from employees enjoying their work. Teachers tend to find satisfaction in working with their colleagues and teaching their students. However, extrinsic motivational factors such as salary and benefits contribute to job dissatisfaction. The central insight of motivation-hygiene theory is that different factors lead to job satisfaction than the factors that create job dissatisfaction. As Herzberg (1987), stated, “The theory recognizes that the factors involved in producing job satisfaction [and motivation] are separate and distinct from the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction” (p. 6). In other words, a person could be not dissatisfied with a job, and yet still not be satisfied. The elements of satisfaction exist or do not exist and the same would be true for elements of dissatisfaction.

Herzberg (1987) labeled the elements that contributed to job satisfaction as motivation factors and the elements that contribute to job dissatisfaction as hygiene factors. Motivation factors can be considered intrinsic and are the primary cause of satisfaction. Examples are self respect, sense of accomplishment, personal growth, the work itself, responsibility and advancement. Hygiene factors can be considered extrinsic and contribute to unhappiness on the job. Examples of hygiene factors are company

policy, supervision, work conditions, salary, and fringe benefits. So a workplace with excellent hygiene factors may still have employees who are not satisfied. They would not be dissatisfied or unhappy, but they would not be motivated and fulfilled because the intrinsic motivation factors would be missing (Gardner, 1977; Herzberg, 1987; Kaiser, 1982). The motivation factors have a longer effect on employee attitudes. If an employee does not feel that he/she is able to utilize his/her skills and talents the employee's psychological well-being is not satisfied.

The distinction between motivation and hygiene factors stems from the recognition that employees have two sets of basic needs. According to Herzberg (1987), one set of needs can be thought of as stemming from a person's built-in drive to avoid pain from the environment. In the workplace, these needs are met by adequate hygiene factors. The other set of needs relates to that unique human characteristic, the ability to achieve and through achievement, to experience psychological growth. Employee job satisfaction results when employees are intrinsically motivated to do the work.

It is clear that, for Wisconsin teachers, hygiene factors have been eroded by state policies regarding education, which have reduced take-home pay and lowered teachers' public status. Salma and Sajid (2012) reported that teachers, especially younger ones, were not satisfied with their income. Teachers who stayed in the profession despite the changes, therefore, have been those who have been able to find or create adequate motivators to maintain job satisfaction. However, as collective bargaining changes resulted in higher insurance cost and less take home pay to teachers, a teacher's salary may become a concern.



### **Teacher Motivation and Student Learning**

Obviously, the problem of teacher retention will be eased if more teachers are motivated and satisfied. According to Cockburn and Haydn (2004) teachers report that job satisfaction is gained from the nature of day-to-day classroom activities, such as working with children, seeing students make progress, working with supportive colleagues, and overall school climate. Even more importantly, motivated and satisfied teachers have been shown to have a positive effect on student learning. The teachers' enthusiasm for teaching, learning, and their subject matter has been shown to be an important part of effective teaching, both in supporting positive relationships with students and in encouraging student achievement (Stronge, 2007). Indeed, education policy makers should pay attention to the factors that motivate teachers if they want to meet their goal of having a competent and qualified teacher in every classroom.

It is ironic that at a time when education policy seems aimed at diminishing teacher autonomy and creativity in the classroom through standardized curriculum and assessments, the globalization of the economy has led to calls for students who are self-motivated, innovative, and creative. Whereas teachers in earlier years focused more on preparing students to follow the directives of a manager or boss, in recent years teachers have been called upon to prepare students for an economy in which many of the jobs they may do may not even exist yet.

From the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1970's, workers' roles were viewed in terms of compliance. Management provided close supervision to make sure that workers followed the rules. During the time of compliance, organizations only needed to buy rote behavior, not commitment and initiative. They didn't need to appeal

to workers' passions or even enlist much of their intelligence (Thomas, 2009). The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries provided a work environment where extrinsic reward, primarily wages and benefits, successfully ensured that the work got done, since the daily work activities themselves provided little self-fulfillment or satisfaction.

However, 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge jobs demand a work environment where the work itself is rewarding. By the start of the twenty-first century workers reported that work that was meaningful, allowed them discretion, and made use of their abilities was exciting and motivating (Thomas, 2009).

It stands to reason that the classroom environments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should likewise be meaningful, exciting and motivating. Education should lead students away from old work-compliance models where close supervision and elaborate rules guided workers to the new work model of organizational purpose and self-management. Therefore, it is important for teachers and students to learn in an environment with intrinsic rewards. Thomas (2009) identified four important intrinsic rewards:

- (a) A sense of meaningfulness – the feeling that one is pursuing a worthy work purpose, one that is worth one's time and energy.
- (b) A sense of choice – the sense that one is able to make one's own decisions and act out one's own understanding of the work.
- (c) A sense of competence – the feeling that one is performing work activities well, that one is doing high quality work.
- (d) A sense of progress – the sense that one is actually achieving the work purpose. (p. 192)

As Jang, Reeve and Deci (2010) discovered, autonomy-supportive teachers nurture students' inner motivation, they create opportunities for students to take the initiative during learning activities, thus helping forge self-motivated individuals. These

teachers build instruction around students' interests, preferences, personal goals, choice making, and sense of challenge and curiosity, rather than relying on external sources of motivation such as incentives, consequences, directives, and deadlines.

Jang, Reeve, and Deci's (2010) conclusions are echoed by Stronge (2007). Regarding students, Stronge wrote, "teachers can effectively motivate them by encouraging them to be responsible for their own learning, maintaining an organized classroom environment, setting high standards, assigning appropriate challenges, and providing reinforcement and encouragement during tasks." Effective teachers, in Stronge's words, are "motivational leaders" (p. 27). Just as providing students autonomous opportunities enhance student learning, autonomous opportunities enhance teacher job satisfaction.

In addition, it is logical to conclude that teacher motivation and job satisfaction not only influence student achievement, but also classroom quality. Malmberg, Hagger, Burn, Mutton and Colls (2010) recognize quality classrooms as providing student-teacher interaction that promotes student autonomy, structure, and cognitive stimulation conducive to students' engagement and learning. Collective efficacy evolves through the efforts of the staff to support, share, and inspire one another and the students. In order to nurture a culture of collective efficacy in a school the school leader must regularly recognize the efforts of the staff and offer ongoing support. A principal must be able to adjust his/her leadership behaviors in order to ensure that leadership assists a school towards positive outcomes (Barnett & McCormick, 2003). Transformational principals place value on building relationships with staff members and providing appropriate support and autonomy. Finally, because collective efficacy has a positive influence on

performance, academic achievement is emphasized, and academic emphasis in turn reinforces collective efficacy (Fahy, Wu, & Hoy, 2010, p.211). In sum, the three elements have transactional relations with each other and the school culture.

### **Summary**

The literature review supports the idea that motivation plays a role in teachers remaining in classrooms. However, the literature cannot determine precisely which factors have contributed to individual teachers' decisions. This study, therefore, sought to understand teachers' drive to stay in their classrooms by speaking directly with teachers. It is hoped that this understanding will contribute to policies and reforms that will support their work as they prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

State and national politicians have largely ignored teacher motivation. "No Child Left Behind is based on a theoretical assumption that consequences will motivate school staff to perform at higher levels and focus their attention on student outcomes" (Finnigan & Gross, 2007, p. 594). However, the research of Finnigan and Gross (2007) found that motivation decreases rather than increases for teachers in those schools that struggle the most. While finding that the policy emphasis may trigger motivational responses, focused attention may lead to improved performance in some schools, they warned that teachers in schools under sanctions could ultimately become overwhelmed by the pressure and demoralized, feeling blamed for the larger inequities in our society.

If policy makers are serious about improving student performance, then there must be efforts to improve the learning environment for both students and teachers. This study investigated the interplay between education policy and teacher motivation, and reached conclusions about the impact of reform efforts on the classroom environment.

Educational policy makers in the United States would benefit from a greater depth of understanding in the area of teacher motivation, as questions relating to teacher performance continue to inflame political debate. Research on teacher motivation needs to be available to experts who make political and policy decisions that impact the educational framework for the future.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This study asked why teachers remained in the teaching profession amidst legislative reforms that impacted their wages, benefits, and working conditions. It sought to inform readers about the mindset of elementary teachers during challenging times. The research may also further inform principals, district administrators, and policy makers of commonalities among the teachers' reasons for staying. The following research questions were explored.

1. What factors contributed to teachers remaining in the profession?
2. How did teachers describe the impact of the legislative reforms on their personal and professional lives?
3. How did teachers perceive the profession since the 2010 legislative reforms?

#### **Study Design**

A qualitative approach using the basic interpretive method was employed. Such an approach utilized the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, as opposed to the analysis of previously existing data sets. The researcher operated from an inductive position, gathering data to interpret. The data were then used to develop rich description of the participants' perspectives of the legislative reforms (Merriam, 2002; Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). The researcher was interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon. This meaning was mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy was inductive, and the outcome was descriptive (Merriam, 2002, 2004). The research provided participants a venue in which to share their lived experiences as teachers. Hatch (2002)

recommends that the perspectives or voices of participants be prominent in any qualitative report. Completing basic qualitative research placed the perspectives of Wisconsin teachers at the forefront.

This study focused on ten Wisconsin teachers. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection tool. Each participant was interviewed on one or two separate occasions. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then were transcribed for analysis.

## **Population and Sampling**

### **Site Selection**

The research study took place in one school district, allowing a focus on teachers with some consistency in professional practice. Enrollment data from the 2011-2012 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction database was utilized to determine potential school district sites. Districts with an elementary student population of 2000-2550 were considered (Wisconsin DPI, 2014, "WISEdash Data Files"). The intent was to complete a study that had relevance for a large audience. Therefore, very large urban districts and very small rural districts were removed in favor of districts with more typical population sizes. However, the findings may have value for both urban and rural school districts.

Once the population threshold was determined, districts that had kindergarten-through-fifth-grade elementary-school structures were identified. This structure provided students six years of growth and development at the same school. Furthermore, it ensured that study participants operated under similar classroom conditions and taught the same children all day and all year. For these reasons, districts that included 4K within the elementary structure and districts with other configurations were not considered. In addition, 4K teachers have no required curriculum and different requirements for

instructional time. The final criterion for site selection was that the chosen district contained a minimum of three elementary schools. Setting a minimum number of elementary schools allowed for greater variability in teachers' experiences. Based on these criteria, seven school districts were considered.

A preliminary contact was made to determine if a district permitted research studies. One potential district was removed from consideration due to the implementation of district-level policies that went beyond the state legislative reforms. Three districts did not respond to the inquiry; one district denied entry; and one district required that an additional proposal be submitted and reviewed by the school board. Only one district, the Northwest Community School District, granted immediate permission to complete the study. Working with district officials, the intent of the study was communicated and principal recommendations requested. It was felt that principals, as the building-level administrators most familiar with the teaching staff, were in the best position to recommend teachers who met the research criteria and might be willing to participate.

The Northwest Community School District is a high achieving school district. According to the Wisconsin Department of Instruction database, the district is categorized as "exceeding expectations". The rating is calculated based on four priority areas—student achievement, student growth, closing the gaps, and on-track and post secondary readiness—minus the student engagement indicators of test participation rate, absenteeism rate and drop out rate (Wisconsin DPI, 2014 "District and School Report Cards"). The district is located on a scenic river valley, just a short distance from a neighboring state. The district covers approximately 80 square miles. The Northwest



Community School District supports approximately 5,600 students K-12. The district has six elementary schools grades K-5, one middle school for grades 6-8 and one comprehensive high school for grades 9-12. Over 830 full and part-time staff serve the students, families, and community.

### **Participant Selection**

Each elementary-school principal in the Northwest Community School District was contacted by e-mail or telephone to explain the study and communicate the required criteria for recommending teachers. The two criteria were:

1. Participants needed a minimum of five years of teaching experience.
2. The principal perceived the participant as having a direct impact on positive student achievement/outcomes.

All six elementary principals provided a list of teachers for consideration. The criteria provided to the principals resulted in each principal subjectively interpreting what having a direct impact on positive student achievement meant based on their own values and beliefs. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges the possibility that principals provided names of teachers that the principals viewed as positive and cooperative. It is unknown if the principal provided names he/she felt would provide favorable responses.

After submitting the teacher recommendations, the principals communicated to their respective staffs that the research study was approved and that the researcher would be inviting teachers to participate. The number of teachers recommended from each school ranged from eight to eighteen. To protect the principals from having to divulge who was recommended for the study and to mitigate any concerns regarding how teachers would interpret the selection process, a purposeful random sampling strategy

was deployed (Patton, 2002). Recommended teachers' names were placed in a box that corresponded to his/her school and then four teachers from each school were randomly selected to participate. Out of this total of 24 invited participants, an initial group of eight from four of the six elementary schools agreed to participate. Even though male teachers were recommended, no males volunteered to participate in the study.

Requiring a minimum of five years of teaching increased the likelihood that the teacher had developed a level of expertise. This particular criterion is supported by Berlinger (2000), whose own model of teacher development "suggests that it takes about five years to proceed from the novice stage of development to the advanced beginner stage to the competent stage of development" (p. 360). Additionally, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's teacher-licensing stages require a teacher to hold a license for a minimum of three years and submit a professional development plan after year three and before the end of year five to be considered a "professional educator" (Wisconsin DPI, "*License Stages*").

To expand the participant pool, the eight initial participants were asked for names of other experienced teachers who might be interested in taking part in the study. The use of snowball sampling (Hatch, 2002) provided the researcher with eight additional names. The eight names were placed in a box and four potential new participants were randomly selected. Of those four, two additional teachers agreed to participate, bringing the total number to ten. Even though the sample size is small, Patton (2002) confirms that in-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable. Table 2 summarizes biographical information on the ten teachers interviewed.

Table 2: *Research Participants*

Teacher	Age	Master's Degree	Years Teaching in Public Schools	Years Teaching in District	Years Teaching at Current School	Current Grade Level Teaching	Would Recommend Teaching	Still Would Choose Teaching
Abby Nelson	34	Yes	11	5	5	4	Yes	Yes
Debbie Thomas	53	No	17	17	16	Kindergarten	Undecided	Yes
Brianna Smith	40	Yes	17	6	6	5	Undecided	Yes
Alicia Frank	59	Yes	35	15	10	4	Yes	Yes
Betty Newman	45	Yes	9	9	9	2	Undecided	Yes
Christine Fuller	45	Yes	23	23	23	4	Yes	Undecided
Trisha Miller	51	In Progress	15	12	12	1	Yes	Yes
Caroline Sanders	36	Yes	13	6	6	4	Yes	Yes
Faye Jones	47	Yes	6	6	6	Kindergarten	Yes	Undecided
Helen Edwards	45	Yes	11	9	9	5	Yes	Undecided

NOTE: All participants are white females.

### Data Collection

Participant interviews and researcher field notes were the data collection tools used. As the primary instrument of data collection, the researcher could be immediately responsive and adaptive, clarifying and summarizing material, checking with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and exploring unusual or unanticipated responses (Merriam, 2002).

During the initial contact with the teachers who agreed to participate, the aim of the research study was explained and the confidentiality of the responses was promised. An interview schedule was established that was convenient for the participants. Prior to each interview, an e-mail reminder was sent in order to increase the probability that the participant would attend. Initial participants were informed that a minimum of two interviews was planned. Scheduling two interviews approximately one month apart

allowed the teachers to develop a level of comfort with the researcher. Due to a family commitment, one of the initial participants was only able to meet once. Additionally, only one extended interview was conducted with the two participants who were added to the study later.

To ensure the comfort of the participant, the interviews took place in a location selected by the participant, under conditions that sought to be personal and well suited for listening. Prior to the first interview, each teacher provided a signed letter of consent and received a copy of the interview questions. The interview sessions followed a semi-structured, one-on-one format (Creswell, 2007, 2008). This format provided a consistent protocol for each interview, yet allowed the use of probes, or sub-questions, to go deeper into an interviewee's response. Each interview session lasted 45-90 minutes.

In general, the interviews were conducted along the guidelines suggested by Patton (2002). First, the interviews yielded detailed, thick description and captured direct quotations about people's personal perspectives and experiences. Second, the researcher had close personal contact with the interviewees and the researcher's personal experiences and insights became an important part of the inquiry. Third, an empathic stance was cultivated that sought understanding without judgment ensuring that the researcher was neutral, by showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness. Finally, the interviews were conducted with an attention to process and the researcher strived to be mindful of the dynamics present.

Each interview was digitally recorded, with the permission of the participant, on an iPad and then transcribed. The digital files were saved to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's "pantherFILE" secure file storage system. The hired transcriptionist was

given access to the secured sharing device in order to transcribe the data. In addition to the recordings, field notes documenting participants' emotions, the physical environment, researcher reflections, and emerging patterns were written at the conclusion of each interview.

To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms. The hard-copy list of participants' names and attached pseudonyms, as well as any paper versions of the transcripts, were secured in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office. Prior to each follow-up interview session, the transcribed notes were sent to the participant for review and validation. Once the interviews were completed, the data were analyzed to determine the emerging themes from the participants' stories.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews generated rich data and required bracketing and then coding to segregate the data into categories for further analysis (Glesne, 2006). There is some disagreement in the literature about when to begin the analysis of interview data. Seidman (2006) recommended avoiding any in-depth analysis until all the interviews were completed to avoid imposing personal viewpoints and interpretation on the process although he encouraged continual mental reflection regarding the interviews and the preliminary formation of conclusions. On the other hand, Glesne (2006) argued that data analysis should be done simultaneously with data collection. In Glesne's view, this enabled a researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeded. Seidman's approach was followed for this study, with all interviews conducted and transcribed before data analysis was completed.

The analysis stage required a reduction of the large amount of text generated by the interview transcriptions (Seidman, 2006). The first step in the analysis after receiving the digital transcripts was to read through each transcript to obtain a general understanding of the data. The next step was to bracket segments of the transcriptions using specific colors to highlight common responses and recurring themes. The researcher continued a manual coding process and extracted key data from the bracketed text and aligned the data to the interview questions asked to the participants. At this point, the researcher recognized larger categories emerging and began to reorganize the data to align with categorical themes. Once the initial bracketed was completed, the process continued. The researcher looked for common words and ideas to further interpret the data relevant to the categories that emerged.

The emerging categories were captured in a matrix and organized into a spreadsheet to code the category, the participant, and key language relevant to the category. The development of the matrix allowed for the identification of key content aligned with the research problem. Additionally, the strategy separated out superficial information (such as the detailed breakdown of day-to-day classroom operations). The initial coding of the transcribed interviews and analytical notes resulted in a matrix of eleven broad categories: educational experience, inspiration, longevity, personality, responsibilities, personal reflection, public perception, school culture, pace of change, job demands, and reasons why they are teaching. The literature associated with job satisfaction and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were overarching throughout the data analysis.

Although, the data analysis did not explicitly include themes of satisfaction or motivation the research themes implicitly were linked. Themes relevant to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation emerged to demonstrate what motivated the participants to stay in the profession and factors that are discouraging. The final filtering of the data reduced overlap and redundancy from the codes collapsing the coding into three specific themes and thirteen emerging sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes are reported in chapter four.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Given the qualitative nature of the research for this study, it is limited in size and scope and cannot be generalized to the larger population. The scope was limited because it included only white female teachers. Furthermore, since it focused on the perceptions of teachers in only one district, it cannot be assumed that the teachers' perceptions represent the perceptions of all public school educators throughout the United States, or even throughout Wisconsin. While other states across the country have enacted similar policy changes, the experiences of teachers in those other states cannot be deduced from the Wisconsin data. Future research could increase the number of participants within Wisconsin to provide a more comprehensive picture of teachers in the state. In addition, the study could be expanded to other regions of the United States or to teachers working at middle, high school and collegiate levels, all of whom are feeling to some degree the pressures described in this study.

### **Subjectivity of the Researcher**

Qualitative studies recognize that all data are interpretive. Glesne (2006) recognized the role subjectivity plays in qualitative research and stated, "When you

monitor your subjectivity, you increase your awareness of the ways it might distort, but you also increase your awareness of its virtuous capacity. You learn more about your own values, attitudes, beliefs, interests, and needs” (p.123). In this study, the researcher was a former public school teacher and principal whose fringe benefits were impacted by Act 10. Additionally, the researcher has friends and former colleagues that were also directly impacted by the legislative reforms. Therefore, the researcher clearly has perceptions regarding the legislative reforms and how the reforms have impacted teachers.

Furthermore, the researcher currently supports districts throughout Wisconsin in the implementation of Educator Effectiveness. The professional experience of the researcher does influence the researcher’s world-view. Although the researcher purposefully focused on developing open-ended questions, did not discuss current job responsibilities or personal beliefs with participants during the research process, and monitored her behavior to ensure participants were not led in any direction when responding it must be noted that the potential for subjectivity exists, as the researcher was the primary instrument of this qualitative study.

In an effort to ensure validity and accuracy, member checking was completed after the first round of interviews. According to Creswell (2008), member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account. Each research participant was emailed a copy of her transcribed interview for review to ensure accuracy. Prior to the second interview, the participant was asked if she had any concerns or comments related to the transcript. Each participant



agreed that the transcript was accurate. This strategy corresponded with Creswell's (2008) method for validating research results.

### **Reciprocity**

Participation in the study was voluntary, with the only benefit to the teachers being the reward of sharing their stories and contributing to further research. Reciprocity is an ethical issue in any research effort, but it is especially important when participants invest themselves in close relationships with the researcher and trust the research with sensitive information (Hatch, 2002). The ethical demand for reciprocity required that the researcher provide an opportunity for participants to give voice to their own experiences in a secure and confidential manner. Upon completing the initial interview, a personal handwritten thank-you note was mailed to each participant. During the follow-up interviews several participants expressed their gratitude at being asked to participate. Teachers described how they had shared the fact that they were being interviewed with their colleagues and commented on how much they enjoyed talking about why they were teaching. In fact, on two occasions the researcher received a hug from the teacher. The teachers enjoyed reflecting on their profession and their professional journey. As a final gesture of reciprocity, the participants were invited to read the completed research study.

### **Conclusion**

A basic qualitative interpretive study was chosen to learn more about why elementary teachers in Wisconsin are remaining in the profession after legislative reforms linked to teacher accountability and collective bargaining were implemented. Ten elementary teachers participated in one or two in-depth interviews and shared their stories. The interview protocols created a structure in which participants could share and

expand on their individual motivation for staying in the teaching profession during such challenging times. The transcribed interviews were analyzed and interpreted to determine three themes and thirteen subthemes. Chapter four will identify the themes and present the findings that emerged from the data.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study examined personal experiences and perceptions of ten elementary school teachers in Wisconsin and why they remained in the profession amidst legislative reforms that impacted their wages, benefits, and working conditions. Although both men and women were invited to participate in the study, all of the participants were females. Prospective male participants declined participation. Teachers from four of six elementary schools in the Northwest Community School District participated in the study. The participants ranged in age from 34-59 years old. The fewest years of teaching experience among the participants was six and the longest tenure was 35 years. The Northwest Community School District is a mid-size, school district in Wisconsin. According to the state report card for 2013-2014, three of the schools represented in the study were rated as “exceeds expectations and one school was rated as “significantly exceeds expectations.” The overall rating for the school district was “exceeding expectations.”

The initial coding of the data allowed the researcher to begin to identify common themes in the interviews. After multiple reviews of the data, through both listening to the digital voice recordings and reviewing the written transcripts, the researcher found three significant themes in the participants’ responses. Further review uncovered sub-themes within each principal theme. This chapter presents the data gathered from the interviews and describes the three broad themes: teacher attributes, professional challenges, and organizational culture. Additionally the chapter discusses the supporting sub-themes associated with each principal theme. The findings regarding each theme created a

greater understanding to why teachers remain in the profession and recognized that while they have stayed they continued to face increased personal and professional challenges.

### **Key Attributes for Teacher Retention**

After analyzing the data, it became clear that the study participants identified by their principals as making a positive impact on student achievement, held certain specific personal qualities in common. In particular, the participants all showed an affinity for routines and structure, a positive personal attitude, a passion for teaching, a child-centered focus, and concern for others. The strongest of the attributes was the desire to be around children and contribute to children feeling successful.

### **Drawn to Children**

All participants shared that a key reason they were teachers was the desire to contribute to the development of children. In fact, eight of the participants interviewed felt they were drawn to teaching at an early age. As Trisha shared, “I knew teaching was for me ever since I was little.” Likewise, Alicia recalled her time playing school as a little girl. “I think a lot of children play school, but I am not sure all children play school to the extent that I did--keeping a grade book, making all my stuffed animals and dolls be students, making little report cards. I just loved the thought of it.” Some of the other participants also recalled their hours playing school as little children as being harbingers of their future profession.

A family tradition of teaching also seemed to play a role in shaping many of the participants’ inclinations toward teaching. Like Trisha and Alicia, Abby also knew from early on that she wanted to be a teacher. Abby comes from a string of teachers. Her grandmother taught in a one-room schoolhouse and both her parents were educators for

over 40 years. Abby sees teaching as the core of who she is. She stated, “Teaching is a noble profession.” If given the opportunity to start her career over again, Abby confidently shared that she would choose teaching.

Christine reported that her father was a teacher and he both inspired her and gave her an understanding of the life of a teacher. “We hung out at the high school a lot with other teaching families. Teachers were role models for me. They influenced who I became.” Christine has a high regard for people. Her mindset today resulted from her experiences growing up and observing others in teaching.

In Helen’s case, her grandfather and her parents worked as teachers. “I come from a long line of people who have been in education for a long time,” she said. “My son is now a teacher. It runs in our family.” Helen’s grandfather actually forecasted that she would be a teacher, yet her parents never encouraged her to go into teaching. “I think my parents did not want me to feel obligated to go into teaching,” she commented. Helen initially went to college to major in psychology. When her husband was transferred, she found work in a daycare. Her favorite day of the week was when she worked in the school-aged room as it allowed her to plan curriculum. “When I did get my education degree, my father said, ‘See, I told you, you would always be a teacher. I just knew you would figure it out.’ My parents wanted me to make my own choice.”

Toward the end of the interview, Helen had tears in her eyes as she recounted the influence her parents had on her. “I know that both of my parents, especially my dad, who is gone now, was really inspirational to children so that has always struck me too.” Helen enjoys teaching and believes she is contributing to her greater community by being a teacher.

During the interview process, nine of the teachers shared early work and school experiences had shaped their desire to become teachers. Several, like Debbie worked around children as teenagers and young adults. “I always worked with children. I was always a camp counselor. I do not know life without working with kids. I never had any other job. It was always with children.”

Brianna, like Debbie, found herself helping out in child-centered environments growing up. “I always loved kids,” she said, ... [and] as I got older I started to find myself in mentorship roles. I was in 4H. In high school I went into elementary classrooms to teach about drug prevention.” Although she started college as a psychology major, she said, “I kept coming back to the idea that I needed to be with people. I knew I had a passion for children.”

Christine followed a very similar trajectory. “I have always liked kids,” she stated. “I loved to babysit, to work in the nursery at church. I did a lot of coaching with the little kids. I knew I liked working with kids.”

Faye, who served as a preschool teacher for seventeen years before moving to public school teaching, also did a lot of work with kids growing up. “I was the oldest and I always babysat. I was always taking care of kids,” she said. Initially, however, Faye started down a different career path in college. It turned out that she did not like it so she chose to return home, go to a different university, and earn her teaching license. “It all just fit,” she stated. “This is what I was supposed to do.”

Even negative experiences can fuel the desire to be a teacher. Debbie shared a memorable childhood experience that she felt influenced her.

I went to a Catholic elementary school growing up and I had two teachers: Sister Marie and Ms. W. When I had Ms. W. she made me cry every day. My mom gave me happy pills to get me to go to school. The pills were actually sugar tablets she put in her coffee. I thought no child should hate to go to school.

Debbie's school age experiences started the curiosity to work with children and commitment to provide a pleasant, nurturing classroom for students.

Additionally, Caroline did not commit to teaching as a result of experiences in her childhood. Although Caroline deeply enjoys working with the students, her decision to become a teacher was different from all the other teachers interviewed. She shared, "I didn't have a lot of experience working with kids when I went to college and now I cannot imagine doing anything else. I decided to go into teaching after watching my roommate in college. She would come home and I would want to do her work instead of my own." Caroline changed her college focus and discovered a perfect career match.

All participants were guided by a desire to positively influence the individual experiences of their students whether the origin of choosing the teaching career stemmed from playing school as a child, having parents or grandparents as teachers, early opportunities to work with children, personal experiences or simply a desire to contribute to the life of a child. The data indicated that the participants were passionate about their chosen profession.

### **Passion**

Although only four out of the ten participants actually used the word passion to describe their attraction to teaching, every teacher expressed a strong desire to teach. The data revealed words such as: desire, purpose, a calling, the core of the participant's

being, a love, inspiration and fortunate when participants shared their feelings related to teaching. The participants' feelings aligned with Hamel's (2012) definition of passion: "A strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something. A significant multiplier of human effort, particularly when like-minded individuals converge around a worthy cause" (p. 248). Based on this definition, the researcher concluded that all ten teachers interviewed were passionate about teaching.

Alicia viewed herself as a very quiet person growing up. She found herself very comfortable around children. Alicia shared, "I think the passion for learning and always feeling comfortable with children drew me to the teaching profession. I love the educational environment. I love what I do."

Abby, who returned to Wisconsin after teaching in two other states, sees teaching as something she has always known. She admired that her grandmother, father, and mother were all teachers. Abby's passion developed as a desire to help her students be successful both socially and academically.

It's something that I am very passionate about. You can really see the outcomes of what you are doing almost immediately. We start our day together kind of as a family. I am really focused on making sure they are working together as a family ... [to] reach their potential in academics. It is inspiring to me when I make that connection with the student. The profession feeds into what I was brought on earth to do. I feel like it really is my purpose, in terms of my personality, my skills and my gifts.



Abby excitedly discussed how she worked with students, especially reluctant learners. This demonstrated that her focus is on the success of her students and how she can use her skills and talents to reach every student.

Debbie spoke about the feeling that she is making a difference, and the impact that has had on her. “It is so rewarding. I just love it,” she said. “Every year I see something in my group of kids that will drop me to my knees and make me want to cry.” She likes the morning hugs and the way that her students are so open and honest with her. “Little kids are just a passion of mine. I just love seeing the excitement on their faces when something clicks.” When parents share that their kids are excited to come to school, Debbie said, “[it] makes my heart soar.”

Trisha also spoke about the relationships with the children that feed her passion for teaching. Her favorite days, she said, are her recess days “because I go out and play with the kids. When they see me getting on the swings or going down the slide or playing tag, the expressions on their faces are priceless,” she commented. “I truly take the children and help them to feel valued, respected, loved and secure. Then, it is a blessing to take them on a learning adventure.” Furthermore, Trisha shared how she mentors her own children who are currently completing teaching degrees. “I tell my own kids who are planning to be teachers [that] when you walk into a classroom, it’s a gift to you to be able to be a teacher and you need to really wrap yourself around that gift. It is an opportunity to impact the future.” Trisha went on to relate that when she told her colleagues that she planned to teach until she is 65 years old, her colleagues were incredulous. But Trisha responded, “What else would I do? It is what I love to do. It is

my passion.” Trisha models her passion for teaching by currently pursuing her master’s degree in reading instruction.

Like the other teachers, Brianna’s passion for teaching derives from a combination of the intellectual challenges, the impact she has on her students, and her fondness for children. When asked about the public perception of her as a teacher, she said that she hopes people see her as driven to help kids succeed. “I can’t think of anything else I would do,” she added. “I love kids; they make me laugh and they make me cry. It is intellectually very stimulating to me.”

It was clear from the researcher’s visit with Betty that she also loved to teach, and for the same mix of reasons as Brianna. Betty chose to leave her first professional job and accepted a job as a school aide. While working as an aide she went back to school to complete her master’s degree in teaching. Betty hated every day when she worked in the private sector. “I love to spend my day with seven- and eight-year-olds, sharing what I know, learning from them, seeing them progress. [They] grow, [they] get smarter, and [they] understand things that they didn’t know before.” Betty said she derived the most inspiration from teaching her students how to write. “I love getting my paycheck, but I really think if I won the lottery or something I would keep teaching.” She continued by sharing, “I know that what I am doing is making a difference. It is the best job in the world. Honestly I will be teaching second grade until I am probably 80 because I just love it.” Betty found the profession to support her passion.

Like the other teachers in the study, Christine attributed her passion for teaching to the love of kids, the chance to make a difference, and the intellectual challenges of teaching. “I love to work with kids. Watching the kids grow inspires me,” she said. Her

successes and her failures in the classroom both inspire her to stay. She added, “I want to be better at what I do. I want to do more with kids. [I am] always looking for ways to become better so kids can find more success in their learning and more confidence in who they are.”

The mix of experiences and emotions that make teachers passionate about teaching led Caroline to confess, “I do not know if I could really describe why I teach.” She does know that she loves it. “I just cannot imagine doing anything else,” she said.

I just love the kids. I think that might be hard for people to understand unless they are actually there doing it. I love when the kids come back that you had [in] years past [and] they give you hugs. [The] parents come back. I love the relationships that I have built. I am always learning. I like being challenged. I like learning new things. It is such a reward at the end of the year. What job can you have where people are so excited to see you every day? I really truly love what I do and I can't imagine doing anything else. I love the kids. I love the teaching. I just love, love, love it!

In fact, the depth of her commitment to teacher was evident when she share that even though her husband has shared with her that within the next year or two their family would no longer need to rely on her income. Caroline's husband had made it clear to her that she would be able to quit her job and stay home, however, they both know she will remain in the classroom. “He wants me to have the option,” she stated, but “it is kind of nice to know that if I were to have that option I still would not do it.”

Aside from the participants sharing how much they enjoy working with children, the researcher also discovered a deep level of joy, excitement and overall positive disposition from the participants.

### **Positivity**

When meeting with the participants the researcher observed that the participants were happy people who looked at the world from a positive perspective. In looking at the data the following words connected to positivity were expressed by the participants: positive, good, inspirational, patient, love, wonderful, fortunate, blessed. However, it was not just the words the participants shared but the smiles and energetic intonation shared during the interviews that led to the theme of positivity being identified.

For example, Alicia, who had been out of school for a period of time due to an accident, shared that when she returned, she really enjoyed everything children would say to her. Alicia said, “It is a continuing cycle of being inspired. When kindergarten students look at you and say they want you for their 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, it is inspiring.” Alicia also shared that she has received messages about how positive her colleagues felt she was. In fact, recently an activity was completed where anonymous messages were given to staff members. Alicia received the following message: “No matter what happens to you in life, you always have that positive attitude, that smiling face and that love for your colleagues and students.” The natural inclination to see the world from a positive perspective helps explain why the teachers enjoy being teachers.

Abby is a very uplifting person who effortlessly responds from a positive perspective. In her presence the researcher observed a hopeful, inspiring person who’s voice intonation projected positive energy. She welcomed the researcher into her

classroom and eagerly shared her perspective. Abby stated, “I try to keep a positive look on everything. I try to stay really objective and look for very concrete answers. ... There are such wonderful things going on right now in education. I think there are teachers working harder than ever.” Abby emphatically reflected that she would choose the teaching profession if starting as a new teacher today.

Debbie also conveyed a sense of excitement and energy as she shared her thoughts. Debbie sees herself as a peacemaker.

I try to work through things. I try not to be negative or obstinate. My husband has taught me to look at both sides of the story. I am always trying to keep the peace and see the other perspective. If you use a calm voice, calm tone, and you are not hurtful with your words I think you can ... still stand your ground and maybe meet in the middle.

Debbie’s positive voice inflection and mannerisms including her laughter and smiles reinforced her positive words throughout the interview.

The interview with Trisha revealed a person who is reflective, spiritual, honest, and dedicated to the good in people. Trisha’s positive attitude toward teaching was captured through a story she shared.

A few years ago I wore a pair of jeans that had holes in them. One of my first graders said, “Mrs. Miller, why do your jeans have holes in them?” I said, it’s Friday and these are my crabby pants. I am going to miss you guys so much this weekend; I have to wear these jeans because I am going to be crabby all weekend because I won’t see you.

She added that she wears her holey jeans if she is out in the city over the weekend, so that “if I run into my students they will say, ‘I saw Mrs. Miller on Saturday and she had her crabby pants on.’” (The researcher met Trisha in the city on a Saturday and, sure enough, she arrived in holey jeans.)

Betty was eager to participate in the study, but was challenged to find time to meet. As a result, the interview with Betty took place in her classroom during her lunch break. As the interview was starting Betty kindly shared that she intended to eat her lunch as the interview took place; however, the interview became more of a conversation and before Betty realized it the interview was completed and it was time for her to resume teaching. Her efforts to respond with clarity, excitement and depth never allowed her to eat. Like the other interviewees, Betty felt fortunate to be a teacher and communicated a very positive outlook on her teaching career.

I like my job a lot. I don't want to do anything else. I feel fortunate to work with great people, and I have wonderful students and a great principal. I live right by school. I mean there are just all kinds of positives about it. I don't have a horrible feeling every day about coming to work. I feel really fortunate and blessed that I have a job that I just really love.

Even though Betty would choose the career if presented with the option today, she struggled to commit to recommending the career to others due to the job demands and changing responsibilities.

Christine and Caroline both expressed their excitement for teaching by simply responding, “I love being here!” From the moment the researcher met both Christine and Caroline it was clear that they had high levels of energy and positivity. In fact, Caroline

clearly identified herself as a positive person and she attempted to use her positivity to influence others.

I can be positive and that can rub off onto other people. I try to be a role model and not be negative and not ever go down the negative road. I always work on building trusting relationships with students and staff. I am optimistic about everything. I have a hard time seeing things in the negative realm. I really do not go down that route.

Most teachers interviewed communicated the same message about their enjoyment of the job and their enthusiasm about making a difference with kids. However, Helen, a second generation teacher who decided to go into teaching only after graduating college with a psychology degree and working in a day care center was not consistently positive throughout the interview. Although she enjoys her job she recognizes that her approach is not necessarily positive at the onset. “My first reaction to everything is always usually, I’m mad. Really, and I will then think through how bad it is going to be, and ... I have to stew on it for awhile, and then I go and I kind of attack it.” Helen is more naturally inclined to look for the challenges whereas others were looking first at the positives. Nevertheless, she believes she can make a difference.

Since the overall education environment in Wisconsin presents many challenges to teachers, the ability to stay positive is critical to effective job performance. That positivity, in turn, is intimately connected with the previously identified attribute of passion. Aside from the broader attributes of being drawn to children, passion and positivity, participants valued a classroom environment that provided routines and structures.

## **Routines and Structure**

The data suggested that all participants relied heavily on consistent routines and structures. The participants viewed routines and structures as strategies to ensure time was not wasted during the day and that students always had an understanding of how the day was structured. Students knowing the daily routines ensured that transitions from each learning experience were efficient. Some of the participants went even further in describing their instructional behavior by identifying specific structures within the daily routines.

Each participant shared her approach to instruction, and while the details differed, the noticeable commonality was that each day each participant followed the same basic pattern. All ten participants felt the sense of predictability was good for the students. Abby, a third generation teacher with experiences teaching both as a special education teacher and a classroom teacher explained, “We’re very structured in my classroom ... [Students] check the easel [for the day’s expectations] ... we start morning meeting and walk into writing.” The students know how to transition throughout the day and complete the expectations for each subject area. Debbie, a kindergarten teacher, makes no assumptions as it relates to what her students know and said that structure was especially important for her young students. “I think kindergarteners need to know what to expect so I am pretty good about keeping my routines the same.”

Of particular note were Trisha routines. Trisha, a self-professed mother figure to students and staff members, approaches the day a little differently from that of the other participants, with the exception that she also tries, through e-mail, to extend the routines of the day to her students’ families. “I send an email to families each morning early



before I leave for school. I give them targets for the [day's] learning.” Then, during the last ten minutes of the day, “we create a family e-mail and send to their families.” The e-mail communications give students and their families a sense of continuity from day to day, and enable them to see how one day's learning leads into the following day. Trisha's desire to have a family atmosphere in her classroom is supported by her efforts to reach out to each family.

While the participants believed that routine and structure are professional necessities, they also recognized their own personal need for structure. “I like structure,” Christine, whose classroom is well organized, stated simply. Brianna described her own personality as being concrete sequential. “I need to get morning jobs organized.... I have all of it laid out.” For Caroline the routines and structures not only help her students, but also herself. Caroline shared, “I have to be very efficient with my time. If I am not in a meeting or working with kids I am getting things together for my teaching.” Even though the structures and routines were not the same among the participants, their actions appeared to provide effective classroom learning environments. In Addition to the need to include routines and structures within the participants own classrooms the data indicated that some participants were concerned for how their younger, less experienced colleagues were surviving all that is required of teachers.

### **Concern for New Teachers**

Although not all teachers interviewed expressed a concern for new teachers there was enough commentary about the issue to warrant being referenced in this study. Abby and Debbie both expressed concern for new teachers. Abby captured their opinions when

she stated, “I think a lot of new teachers feel that they need to be perfect the first time. I think that can burn teachers out fast.”

Brianna also expressed empathy for those coming into the field now. “For me, I know my job. I know how to teach kids. I know how to teach content,” she asserted. “For somebody who has not taught math or reading or whatever before, you can’t just figure it out fast.” In addition, she emphasized that the high number of initiatives coming from the state authorities made it difficult for new teachers to gain confidence in their skills. “New teachers may decide the job is really hard,” she worried, and think they cannot do it. New teachers need time to gain “just being successful [at] teaching,” she said, “without all the data and all the other stuff.” The teachers were concerned for their young colleagues because as experienced teachers they found the job challenging and know that being new adds further challenges.

Brianna, a veteran teacher with seventeen years of experience, believes that new elementary teachers need strong mentoring programs, especially in the critical areas of math and literacy. “I think those are the two high-stakes areas. It is management, preparation, planning, differentiation and how to manage time. Who do you go to when you are sobbing and cannot make this kid be successful or just got a horrible email from a parent and you need to have somebody help you?”

At Betty’s school, there is such a mentoring program. Betty serves as a mentor to a new teacher and spoke about how she tries to let her mentee know that the emotions she is experiencing are normal. “The teacher I mentor was saying that sometimes she wonders what she is doing, why she is teaching,” Betty said. “Everyone does in the beginning. I would never discourage her. I explain that you have ups and downs. That

is normal.” As Betty sees the challenges her mentee faces she struggles to decide if she would recommend the profession to others considering teaching.

Helen, like Betty, serves as a mentor to a newer teacher. She expressed concerns regarding the many challenges of learning the curriculum and knowing what is grade appropriate for students. As a mentor, she is now trying to support a new teammate through the growing pains that occur from simply not knowing the curriculum or the grade-level outcomes.

Support for new teachers is a necessary part of growing a collaborative culture within a school and within a district. The good news for new teachers as well as the experienced teachers in the Northwest Community School District is that there are organizational structures. At the time of the study, it was noted that the teachers have regularly scheduled collaboration time. This structure supports the development of the new teachers. With the efforts and support of others in the school, the challenges become manageable.

Teachers recognized as having a positive impact on student success appear to have commonalities in their individual personalities. The personal attributes of the participants indicate that teachers who remain in the profession have a natural disposition toward being positive, deeply desire to work with children, and have a greater awareness of the transition new teachers experience.

### **Professional Challenges Facing Teachers**

State and Federal policy changes have placed additional expectations on teachers. As a result, they regularly experience a feeling of being overwhelmed. Even though participants were curious about an alternative career path due to the challenges seven

participants stated they would choose the career if they were given the option and three participants were undecided due to the increased challenges. One interviewee, Brianna, shared a conversation she had with a friend who is a teacher in a different district. The teacher previously taught part-time and was now a full-time teacher. The friend related that she did not know if she could continue as a teacher. After listening to her friend, Brianna concluded, “It was all of the district initiatives that were totally weighing her down; she loves to be with kids and she loves teaching her content, but all of those other things quickly became overwhelming.”

Seven of the participants interviewed described similar pressures. At times, they questioned if a different profession would be a better option. The responses of the research participants provided a deeper understanding of the many professional challenges facing teachers.

### **Time Needed to Meet Demands of the Job**

Participant after participant reflected on the reality that there is not enough time to do all of what is asked at a level that is satisfactory to the teacher. Participants felt that they have given up time with their families and friends to try to keep up with the demands of the job. Abby brought to her job perspective from teaching in two different states. She experienced the call for increased rigor and accountability while teaching elsewhere. Nevertheless she has concerns that the public does not understand the demands of the job. “I think that the general public view is that a planning time of forty-five minutes is an end all, and can wrap everything up. It’s really just finishing what you’ve started and setting up what you’re going into next.”

The message from participants was that the preparation time provided by the district is insufficient for purposes of longer-term planning or adjustments to curriculum. According to Abby, the twenty minutes of preparation before and after school allow her "... the opportunity to post her morning message and set up. There is no true grading during that time or evaluation that I am monitoring. Any preparation [beyond] that means I generally stay until 5:30 p.m., but some work still comes home." Alicia voiced similar concerns about the time pressures on teachers. "It's never ending, it's always on your mind." She remarked that during the summer months she has the leisure to think about new approaches to learning. "If I go to a store, or if I go to a state park, it's just fun because I look for things that would be great in the classroom." During the school year, however, it is a different story. "Right now it's a bag full of papers that I would like to finish grading--a unit test in math, ... the spelling test from last week; tomorrow I am giving a grammar quiz. The constant correcting, much less marking down on report cards, there's always something you can do besides the planning." Alicia went on to share that a friend who recently retired left because she could not face Sunday nights and evenings any longer.

All ten participants commented on their desire for more preparation time than the district allocates. Teachers are provided 45 minutes before school, 45 minutes during the day, and 20 minutes after school. Each of the participants also shared that many of the designated preparation times are used for meetings. In fact, there is a specific district required meeting every sixth day that often involves the principal and additional resources staff such as the reading specialist. This meeting is used to monitor student progress and adjust instructional interventions as needed. The requirement to attend

numerous meetings over the course of the week provides minimal time for comprehensive planning. As a result, the planning is done outside the school day.

In her interview, Debbie spoke about the day-to-day uncertainties and unexpected events that also complicate planning efforts. “I never know when I am going to have a parent meeting or parent call, or a meeting; I have to be prepared. I never know what is going to happen the next day, so I stay or I pack it up and I take it home. Our day does not end.” Her weekends, she said, are spent with her lesson plan book and her manuals spread over “the entire floor or the couch. I have to have everything there. I look ahead: These are the lessons I need to cover; these are the assessments I know that are coming up. So I have to make sure I’ve taught this lesson. I take work home every night.”

Trisha front-loads her day to allow adequate time for class preparation. She arrives at school at approximately 7:00 a.m. each day. Her students do not arrive until 8:50 a.m. This allows Trisha the time she needs to ensure she is ready to teach for the day. Trisha plans her guided reading groups and stations during her morning preparation. In addition to these early weekdays, she said, “About four hours of the weekend is used for all my lesson planning.”

Like Trisha, Betty’s workday also typically begins well before the school day. She usually arrives at school about 7:30 a.m. “I need at least an hour in the morning to get myself ready.” That hour may be taken up with a staff or team meeting, she said, or she may use it to mentor a new teacher. “All that happens before school.” On days when there is no meeting, she uses that time for afternoon class preparation. In addition, she has to find time either in the morning or during the school day to write a blog entry for her class’s virtual pen pals in Sweden. After school she meets with parents and gets

ready for the next day. “Sometimes I tutor students starting at 4:00 p.m. I usually get home between 4:30 and 5:00 p.m. I used to work a lot of weekends, both days, [during] my first ... five years, but now I have gotten so I don’t need to do that so much.”

However, Betty confessed during one of the interview visits that sometimes the demands of the job forced her to extend her workday even more. “This week I am feeling so stressed ... because we do not have enough time. We have to prep for like seven different things. I get here at 7:00 a.m. and I take stuff home, but if I quit doing that, then I can’t do my job.”

Indeed, each participant shared how she regularly works outside of the district-designated workday. Brianna, for example, arrives at school approximately 45 minutes ahead of time to prepare for the day. However, three of the five days are usually spoken for as she has meetings to attend. “Tuesday is a staff meeting, Thursday is the team meeting, and then Wednesdays are rotated through the different committees.” The committees include the leadership team, “which deals with data, smart goals, stuff like that;” the child study team, which “looks at kids who are struggling to succeed;” and PBIS team, “which looks at school culture [and] behavioral things.” That does not exhaust the list of committees, according to Brianna. Her school also has sunshine, garden, and school wellness committees. Brianna reported that she typically does not leave work before 5:00 p.m. and “one night a week I am at school until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. When I leave at 5:00 p.m., there’s usually about an hour or an hour and a half of work that happens [at home] once I get my kids in bed.”

Christine also described a typical day as beginning before school, being filled with meetings and messages, as well as hurried classroom preparation, and ending well

after dismissal. After her own children leave for school at 7:00 a.m., Christine arrives at her workplace to answer e-mails, correct papers, and prepare for the day. Then, “from 8:00 a.m. it is game on. I attend various meetings, such as staff meetings and IEP’s. I am also on the PBIS team and we meet once a month. It might be meeting with a staff member, just touching base. I have students with learning disabilities and I may touch base with their teacher.” When her students meet with specialists, Christine may take the time to plan the next activity, meet with her team members or her principal, or communicate with parents. Her day extends until 5:00 or 5:30 p.m., followed by one or two hours a night at home three nights a week. On weekends, she spends about four hours preparing. “Preparation is constant. I don’t think I’ve ever stopped.” During the school year, “you are preparing for the moment, the day, the month, ... the quarter, the trimester. Summer feels like preparing for the future.”

The participants also expressed their frustration at trying to juggle the ever-increasing time demands of teaching and time for their own families. According to Brianna,

The more you know about the child, the more you know about what needs to happen, the more you realize that you need a lot more time in your day. It’s overwhelming and it becomes for me a very [big] ethical challenge of what I know I need to do versus what I am able to accomplish. I can’t be at my job for twelve hours a day. If I could I would probably feel good about what I do, but I can’t because I need to be with my family.

Brianna works to find time to meet the expectations she has set for herself as a teacher and to be there for her family. She checks her email at home in the morning prior



to getting her children on the bus, for example. Similarly, Christine has struggled to find ways to balance the time demands of teaching with the need to help her family. “Before I leave the house in the morning I check email. I may start emailing or texting another teacher back and forth or [we may] even call each other on our way to work.”

Family obligations can often extend a workday into the late hours of the evening. Caroline, for example, reported that she tries to leave school by 4:30 or 4:45 each day. “I have my own children that I have to pick up and they are young. Sometimes my husband can pick them up and I can stay later. After my children go to bed I do school work again. It is a lot.”

This is not simply a matter of better time management. Most teachers have become excellent classroom planners. Brianna, for example, writes out all of her lesson plans. “I need to know the lesson, I need to know the games we’re going to play in math, how I am going to assess how the students are doing on that lesson. I have all of that laid out.” However, Brianna acknowledged that her efforts still are not enough to differentiate at the level she would like for each student. “There just isn’t time to get it all done. Once you add in guided reading, that’s another five lessons that you’re preparing for two or three times a week. The amount that is coming at you is intense.”

Similarly, Caroline said, “I have to be very efficient with my time.” After she arrives at school, she connects with colleagues or attends morning meetings. Her grade-level teachers move students around through the day, so day-to-day conversations are very important. The team is making daily decisions related to the support needs of particular students. During Caroline’s 45-minute preparation time she organizes what is needed for upcoming meetings and plans instruction with grade-level members.

“Preparation can be very overwhelming,” she reported. “I can say I never get a lunch break. I sit down for maybe ten minutes of my lunch break to eat. Otherwise, that is my time when I do a lot of my stuff.”

When the participants were asked to reflect on the reasons behind these time pressures, some pointed to the changing role of the elementary school teacher. The irony, as Brianna pointed out, is that while the new roles require more intensive preparation, the time allocated to prepare has not changed.

Previously we were considered generalists, and just taught a little bit of everything. Now I am kind of an interventionist, but the time to be that interventionist has not changed. I am expected to be an interventionist in math, an interventionist in reading, an interventionist in writing, in spelling or whatever else comes my way. I teach a sixty-minute math lesson and do a small group lesson for struggling students and now you want me to add two reading groups a day, a small group in writing, a small group in math, and then deal with my kids.

The expectations have ramped up but the schedule still looks the same.

Christine echoed these sentiments. “When I first started, teaching was more prescribed in a sense that it was part of a teacher’s manual, and I followed it.” Now teachers have the opportunity to make changes in the curriculum and are asked to work with students individually. Effective teaching in the new environment requires time and collaboration, she said. “[I need] time to individualize instruction and time for me to reflect ... [and time] for me to work with someone else.” While she reports that her team is “constantly collaborating, finding the time to collaborate is challenging. It’s over lunch. It’s five minutes in the hallway.”

The participants expressed a desire to better balance the professional demands of their job, but were unsure as to how to recalibrate family and job due to the necessity to proficiently execute the current job requirements while simultaneously implementing new changes. The speed at which new initiatives were implemented required teachers to commit more time to learn about the new practices as well as implement the new requirements.

### **Pace of Change**

While some teachers interviewed shared how much they enjoyed the opportunity for change, they acknowledged that the pace at which change was occurring had become unsettling. As Alicia, who is nearing retirement and academically oriented, reported, “We have at least one subject that is different than the year before every year.” Debbie, a highly organized teacher, expressed similar concerns:

I would have to say the changing [of] the curriculum, the changes in some of the policies [is the most difficult challenge]. I think we are pretty lucky in our district. We’ve been, I think, on the edge of keeping up with the latest curriculum so some of the transitions have not been difficult for us because we are already trying to meet what the state wants us to do.

She admitted that accepting change was not always easy for her, and that “with each change I think I cannot do this anymore, but then you work through it.” Adapting to change was made somewhat easier by the realization that she was not alone, that other staff members were going through the same pressures and anxieties. “It is never boring, that’s for sure.”

Brianna, a very reflective person, who actively serves on district committees, connected the issue of curriculum changes to the broader issue of the ability to get everything that is expected of her done in a timely fashion.

There are so many initiatives ... coming down the pike. We have Common Core Standards, we have new assessments, we have new testing issues, we have the implementation of PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports), RtI (Response to Intervention), and all of these things that come at you. Education is always moving, always changing--sometimes too fast. That is what has been hard the last few years, the pace of change. You can't keep up.

Brianna went on to say, however, that in the last year her district has "done a better job of slowing down the amount of initiatives coming out, slowing down the pace of change." As a result of Brianna's experience serving as a literacy coach in a different district she is able to see the broader picture as to how the school level efforts connect to the district level initiatives.

Another interviewee, Betty, commented on the irony that at a time of budget cutbacks, her district's ample resources have allowed it to experiment more readily. "We are very fortunate in our district to have so many resources, [but] sometimes that is a disadvantage in a way. We have money for changes in curriculum, so things are constantly changing, whereas some districts invest in something and stick with it a long time."

Christine, a participant who has dedicated her entire twenty-three year professional experience to the Northwest Community School District, confirmed the thoughts shared by other participants. "It is hard for people to keep up [with] the learning

piece of it and what we are getting into with Common Core and standards. You constantly need to change and keep updated.” Christine is fortunate as she actually enjoys the fact that she is always learning and that the district is providing training.

I like the fact that my brain is active and I am problem solving and trying to help kids. I am not going to say that at times I don’t get overwhelmed, ... but we always work through it. There is a sense of, not drowning, but overload. There’s new curriculum, new technology, and there is not enough time.

She praised the support and mentoring she received by three veteran teachers when she first arrived in the district. Her early experiences surrounded by others with great knowledge taught her the importance of learning.

Soft-spoken Trisha, who worries about her own children who are entering the teaching profession, shared, “I have noticed that even seasoned veterans are doubting themselves in the past couple years. I am not sure why, except the pace of change and the demands are very great. Last year I thought, I don’t know if I can do this.” This common feeling of being overwhelmed is not just a result of the pace of change, but also stems from changes that were mandated by both federal and state policies.

### **Political Realities**

Since the passage of Act 10 and Act 166, teachers have become more aware of legislative mandates and how the mandates influence the teaching profession. After Act 10 changed teachers’ collective bargaining rights and unions lost negotiating power, teachers began to put more effort into learning about legislation that impacts their livelihood. “That’s very scary to me,” said Debbie, when asked about the impact of Act 10. “I am rethinking retiring. I thought for sure I was going to retire in two years, but

now with all of the changes with retirement and health care I don't know if I will be able to afford to retire." According to Alicia, "I have friends who ... were both teachers and they discouraged their son who wanted to be a teacher." Alicia said her friends are concerned about the future of the teaching profession in Wisconsin. Similarly, Betty, who serves on the handbook committee in the district and thus has been looking at different models of benefit packages, said that, "a lot of districts are saying anyone hired after 2012 will get no retirement. Nothing!"

As for the immediate impact on her of Act 10, Betty recognized that due to legislative changes her health insurance premiums have increased, resulting in less take home pay. "I know now for sure that I have to save a lot more money on my own. That has changed my financial planning." She also said that given "the way things are now, I would maybe be thinking of getting out because of the money." However, Betty also talked about knowing what she was getting into when she entered the teaching profession. "I feel like I really can't complain about money in teaching, because I knew it was never going to be that I'd make a lot of money. But ... I think my time is spent better here than doing other things." In addition, Betty said that her district just completed a compensation review, comparing their compensation packages with other districts in the area. "I do feel that I am compensated fairly," she said.

Like Betty, Brianna looks more to district comparisons when evaluating her compensation than to state-level policies. "I think our district has done a good job of saying they value their teachers and they know that if their teachers are going to stay they have to create a good working environment. The district has been working the past couple years trying to make our salaries more comparable." As a result of this district-

level perspective, Brianna believes that the passage of ACT 10 has not impacted her greatly.

Like Brianna, other teachers felt that Act 10 had not really impacted them. In Abby's case, she is able to rely on her husband's benefits. "I have a fallback," she said, although she admitted that individual teachers are "doing it on their own" or couples where both partners work in education would feel a greater impact. Helen's perspective is the opposite, as her husband's corporate job does not offer near the insurance coverage available through the Northwest Community School District she is satisfied with her benefits as a teacher.

Indeed, not all participants interviewed view Act 10 negatively. By limiting union power, the legislation gave districts more flexibility in tailoring compensation packages to individuals. For example, while she admitted that she does not like some of "Scott Walker's shenanigans," Betty realized that her district would not have been able to compare its compensation with other area districts or increase the salaries of the people "who needed to be increased" without the legislative changes.

In fact, what worries participants more than Act 10's collective bargaining provisions are the evaluation provisions contained in Act 166 concerning educator effectiveness. The Wisconsin Department of Education has set high standards for the professional practice of teachers. Effective for the 2014-2015 school year teachers will be evaluated on both their professional practices and student outcomes. Teacher ratings in both of these areas will be submitted to the Department of Public Instruction each time the teacher is evaluated in the summative cycle.

One pressing concern under this new system is that teachers who work with more socio-economically disadvantaged children will be judged unfairly. Helen, for example, works at a school with a very diverse student body. She said that, given the research that shows the high correlation between socio-economic level and test scores, “it kind of frightens you with the direction Wisconsin is going with K-12 performance. What frightens me most is that people won’t want to work in schools like our school if they are going to be judged on test scores to determine your pay.... Our district is moving to performance pay next year and that is really scary.” Helen went on to share,

About fifty percent of our performance evaluation is going to be based on student data. It was not like that before. I do not feel like that is in line with what I have control over. ...If I am going to experience pay for performance, and I know the kids at a different school in the district will always do well on the state test, then I am going to try to get a job over there. That just bothers me and it is not fair to the kids. I think it might lead to divisiveness in a school community of teachers.

Helen worries those schools like hers will not be able to retain quality teachers under such an evaluation system, and that the students who need the most support will be deprived of the people who can advocate on their behalf. However, she added, “our district is being very supportive of us as teachers. We piloted MyLearningPlan this year, which is one of the ways that the district is thinking of monitoring teacher progress. We have had a lot of support in the process.”

The new evaluation system envisions a system where teachers are judged not just on their professional practices, but also on broader measures of individualized student progress. These student learning objectives, commonly referred to as SLO’s, are an



object of concern for Faye as she contemplates the new evaluation system. “How do we do the student learning objectives? We have to make sure we know where students are and make sure we track them and do their progress reports, because someday that is going to be how we are paid for performance. I worry about this.”

Despite their specific concerns about Act 166, participants seem resigned to the changes that are underway. “I think the teacher effectiveness is a good thing,” said Debbie. “I think it holds teachers accountable. It is kind of scary, but every kind of change is.” Moreover, as Brianna pointed out, the newest mandates simply continue a data-driven trend in education that has been ongoing.

When No Child Left Behind came in, everything started to change. It became very data driven and very differentiated on what we had to do in order to meet that mark of what was the growth that kids were expected to make and did they make it. There’s so much data and the expectations are so high and the need to make kids successful is so great that then the pressure you put on yourself is unbelievable.

Reforms to the state’s education agenda created tension in the state of Wisconsin as well as across the nation. As a result, a great deal of attention was given to the reforms by local, state, and national media outlets. The general public and public school educators weighed in on the topic creating tension.

### **Public Perception**

At various times during the interviews participants expressed their concerns about how the public is responding to education in Wisconsin. Debbie shared, “I hear what other people are saying and it gets me angry. They think that we are babysitting, or they

don't think we are teaching enough. The public does not look at us as professionals.”

All the teachers interviewed took a great deal of pride in their work and were struggling with how people were perceiving teachers.

Much of that negative messaging grew out of the legislative changes and heated rhetoric aimed at public school unions. The scrutiny was difficult for teachers to accept. The research participants personally internalized the attacks. While the legislative changes were difficult for the participants to accept for many reasons, one primary reason was that they felt insulted and devalued. Participants took the changes as a personal attack rather than as a strategic move to improve the state's financial picture, as Governor Walker portrayed them. “The hard part about the legislative issues,” said Christine, “is that they impact me and I take it personally. Teachers feel that they are not respected.” For Christine, the pay cut, the reduced insurance benefits, the lack of a labor contract, and the rest of the benefits and protections that were cut made her feel “feel less respected as an educator.”

One of the most damaging messages sent by Act 10 and Act 166 were that teachers were not doing a good job. Protected by union contracts and shielded from public accountability, teachers were depicted as over privileged beneficiaries of state tax money. While people may not say such things in a one-on-one conversation with a teacher, said Brianna, “publicly I think we're more often dragged through the mud, told we're lazy, and [that we are] failing kids. The public perception of a teacher ... is not what it used to be and that's hard. I believe the majority of teachers are giving 110% of themselves and their heart is in it and they are about kids.”

Many of the participants felt that the public does not understand the difficulties and complexities of teaching in the new environment. As Brianna explained, “It is a hard place to be, because everyone went to school, everyone believes himself or herself to be an expert in school, and they take it upon themselves to tell you how it should be.” Betty voiced similar frustrations. “No one sits around and looks at doctors and says you should be doing your job this way, you shouldn’t have done that, you should be doing this, but they do it to teachers.”

Part of the public’s perception problem, according to Brianna, is a misunderstanding of the new teacher assessments. When completing their SLOs, teachers are required to write the SMART goals for which they are responsible. These goals, and whether or not they were achieved, are reported to the school board and published in the newspaper. “The community doesn’t understand that there ... is an accumulative nature to these standards,” Brianna said. “Students that do not meet the goals may not have had the necessary foundation for meeting those standards, which are new. Such nuance is often lost in the public conversation, however. The community only sees that the students were supposed to learn certain skills, but did not, and thus come away with a negative perception of how well teachers are doing their jobs.”

The interviewees also felt that the public did not know or appreciate how hard teachers work. “I would love to punch a time clock just [to] have people know how much time I am spending on schoolwork,” said Betty. While they may recognize that teachers do more than “our 8 to 4,” she said, “if they add up all the extra hours” everybody in the building puts in, they would see “how much free work they are getting. I am not complaining about our district. It is just the profession. Everywhere you go it is

the same.” Likewise, Christine believes the public has a perception “that teaching is not hard. It is just a thing you show up and you do all day. I do not think people understand it.” The teachers believe that the public perception of educators also took a hit because of teachers’ resistance to the reforms.

In February 2011, a massive teachers’ protest took place in Madison against the proposed changes. Barred from just walking out, many teachers planned on calling in sick in order to attend the protest. Helen readily recalled what happened at her school.

When teachers planned to call in sick and go to Madison a negative perception developed. We actually started doing a poll around the building, [and] there weren’t many people [in our school] who said they would be walking out, but the district said they did not have enough substitutes. Since the district closed my school’s scheduled school dance was canceled. A parent in the school decided that the kids were not missing the dance. The dance was held at a location away from school. I sat down in my bathroom and bawled my eyes out. He [that parent] had developed this negative perception of teachers in general.

Like Helen, Trisha believes that the February protest created a negative perception of teachers. The public did not like the fact that teachers called in sick just to go to Madison. “The sad thing was that the ones that didn’t call in sick that day were all lumped together. It has given us a black eye.”

The negative public perceptions are difficult for teachers to accept. As Christine stated, “It is not a good time as people are critical.” Betty said that she believes that the community in general supports teachers, but that “there is a little group of really negative people and they are very loud and noisy about it. They are after teachers and principals.”

Like Betty and Christine, Trisha takes the negative perceptions personally. “It is a very emotional thing for me. I am a person who’s very proud of what I do and I take a lot of effort to put forth the very best I can in my classroom. So it’s tough to have that perception still prevail.”

Christine admitted that education politics in Wisconsin and the often negative portrayals of teachers can drag her down, but she tries to focus on the positive things. “I am still here and this is what I do every day. I still work hard. I still have a job.” Trisha, too, tries to soldier through the feeling that the politicians and the public view teachers negatively. “I stay in spite of what the world says about teaching. It’s the best profession.” Although the participants wondered about different professions, each participant has remained a teacher.

### **Professional Curiosity**

Six out of ten participants shared that there were times during their career when they wondered what it would be like to not be a teacher. None of the participants emphatically shared a desire to be working in a different field, but rather a curiosity as to what a different job would be like. Would the job provide for more family time, more respect, and/or more money? The participants who had not considered a different career did so less because of a sense of contentment as teachers and more because of the prospect of retirement. In reality, every participant felt they were in the right profession.

Abby believes she is in the right profession, for example, but worries about stability. “I feel like it [teaching] really is my purpose, in terms of my personality, my skills, and my gifts,” she said. However, “it’s hard to capture ... how productive you are, how you’re able to reach students.” She wonders why others teachers were asked to

leave and how she can ensure she is doing what is expected of her. “I have watched some teachers lose their positions based on ... not being productive.... It would be nice to know what to avoid, which avenue not to take. I know I’ve received evaluations that have been successful, but I’ve heard they’ve had successful evaluations in the past and now they are not here.” This uncertainty has led her to think occasionally about different careers.

In Debbie’s case, she wonders if a different career might not carry more prestige than teaching. “You see these high powered women, nice clothes and everything like that. I would love to do that.... If I could go back maybe I would want to try something ... more executive.” When these thoughts have occurred, she said her husband reminded her that such a job would not fit her personality. “He is right. I do not think I could survive doing that. I do not think I could sit behind a desk or work in a cubicle.” Like many of the teachers interviewed, Debbie said, “working with little kids has always been a passion of mine. I do not think I could make a difference in the executive world.” Although she remembered days, even years, when she questioned why she was teaching, she confessed that she could not imagine herself not being a teacher. “Here you can make a difference in someone’s life, you could turn someone around.”

Like Debbie, Helen reported that the chance to make an impact on a child’s life keeps her in teaching. Helen admitted to having a personality that responds quickly to adverse conditions—maybe too quickly. “There were a lot of years I thought: ‘I am out of here,’ and I have said it ... not just to myself but ... to other people. I am out of here if this [happens] or I am out of here if that [happens].” But after time to reflect and give her emotions a chance to stabilize, she said, “I find myself back in the same place every year.

It is the kids, I guess. I think I know what is good for them. My level of confidence right now tells me that I should stay. I feel that I can make a difference.”

For Trisha, the questions arise not about the field of education, but about her place within the field. “I don’t see myself in a business profession, but maybe something in ... a different part of education. Maybe a college somewhere.” Reflecting on her past, Brianna said that she may have settled for her current position, rather than aiming higher. “I didn’t think I was smart; I didn’t think I was capable. As I’ve gotten older I realize that I didn’t give myself credit [for] what I was capable of.”

Contrary to some of the other participants, Betty entered the teaching profession after time in the business sector. “I have had a job I hated so I know the difference between working in the corporate world and working in public education. I could never, ever go back to an office job.” Even though Betty has no intention of leaving the teaching profession, her sense of self worth still causes her to think about different careers. “There are times where I think [that] with a Master’s degree I could be making more money, so maybe I should look into some other kind of career.” Despite these moments, however, she has no real desire to leave teaching. “I have had very few days in nine years that I have dreaded coming to work. Before, I dreaded it every single day.... I just really like my job. I cannot think of anything that would cause me to leave.”

Christine and Alicia think not about different careers but rather about retirement. “I love kids and I love being here,” Christine said, but “the challenges we face now as teachers, as compared to ... when I started twenty-three years ago, [are immense]. Kids are different, parenting styles [are different], [the] curriculum [is different]. The demands put on us as teachers continue to [increase]. I can see myself getting tired.” Christine

believes she could find other things to do after teaching that would be “really interesting and kid related,” and that leads her to question how long she will stay on. “It is exhausting when you think about what you do every day here. I can see myself retiring because of the demands.”

Alicia voiced similar sentiments. “I love what I do. I just sometimes [say] that there’s too much of it, meaning the amount that we’re responsible for.... It’s one of the careers where there’s no ending to the day, because you always feel like you can do more.” While Alicia cannot see herself in a different field, she does think about retirement. Faye was one of the few participants who could not imagine a different career since teaching is all she has ever known. “In the past few years people have left based on principle,” she noted. “I don’t know if I could do that.” Some of those who left “wrote very heartfelt letters and ... were great teachers. I just couldn’t believe it.” Faye stayed, she said, “... for personal reasons, probably for family reasons.” The salary and benefits were vital to her family’s well being. “Money is not the driving force but it helps. I think I earn a fine wage for what I do every day.”

In summary, the research study identified that teachers clearly could identify the significant challenges they face in the profession. The profession requires teachers to sacrifice time away from their families to meet the job demands, while juggling significant changes brought forth from legislated mandates. The institutional stresses were compounded by public criticism resulting in the participants not feeling supported by members of their community and the public in general. However, participants did feel supported by their peers, principals and district officials. The data indicated that the organizational support participants received contributed to the desire to stay in teaching.



## **The Influence of the Organizational Culture**

All teachers who were interviewed highlighted the positive culture of their respective schools. The participants figuratively lit up when speaking about their schools. The data showed that the energy and excitement within the school culture grew out of the high regard for collaboration. Efforts to work together included colleagues, the principal, and the district office validated the important role people play in developing an effective district and school culture.

### **Colleagues**

All ten participants drew connections between working collaboratively with colleagues and their own enjoyment and success. Helen's story, for example, demonstrates how working together is helping her and her colleagues. Helen's team reviews data from math tests together to see who is doing well. This is new in their district this year, and "we are trying to get comfortable sharing our information," Helen said. "How can we learn from each other?" Helen confessed that "putting your data out there to show what you have been doing as a teacher" can be a little intimidating, but "the more collaborative effort is actually a really good feeling. I enjoy that about my job."

One key to cultivating a spirit of teamwork is openness and honesty. Abby sees herself as a flexible person able to be open and honest. "I think longevity helps," she said. "[There is] no need for a façade that everything is working well. People are able to be honest." Experience gives people confidence that "you can do it together and stay focused," she continued. Abby also recognized the contributions of both the teachers and the staff providing supplemental services. "I think our supplemental services do a

wonderful job infusing themselves into the general population,” she said. “I feel that all of the teams work very well together.”

The spirit of teamwork at the professional level can lead to personal closeness among teachers. Those personal bonds, in turn, foster increased collaboration. “I absolutely love coming to work,” said Debbie. “The staff is very caring, very kind, and always helpful.” Those attributes extend into the personal realm. “If someone is in need we do meals on wheels,” Debbie noted, “and we donate our sick days if someone is dealing with something catastrophic. We jump at the chance to help out. I love who I work with.”

That feeling of closeness is exemplified by Trisha’s reference to her school as a family. “The staff is a family, the students, [the] families. When you walk in the front door the secretaries know who you are. The secretaries know all of the kids.”

Like families, staffs that work well together have people that bring different attributes to the table. As Brianna commented, “Diversity of personalities is helpful.” On her three-person team, for example, one of her colleagues is “abstract, random, sees the big idea, very creative.” Her other colleague is “the emotional, connectedness person. We all have different strengths.” Brianna credits her team with improving her effectiveness as a teacher. “I would not be who I am without my team. We have a high level of trust and professional regard for each other. It is a very good working relationship.” Despite their differences, she said, they share a common vision. “We are here for the kids. It is the kids first.”

A number of other participants remarked on a similar shared vision. As Christine said of her colleagues, “We know we all have the same purpose: What’s best for [the] kids.” Chris went on to gush about her school:

I think a lot of people come in our school and say this is a great place. The people are friendly. It is a place where kids’ needs are put first. We are constantly looking at how we [can] best meet student needs, whether they are doing really well and needing something else or [whether they] need further support. We are a team--a common force to move forward.

Christine credits that collaborative atmosphere for keeping her in education. “The people I work with contribute to why I stay in teaching. I am part of a community, a family.”

Participants mentioned that one of the benefits to being part of an effective team was the ability to bring problems to other people in a safe, confidential way. As Caroline commented, “If we are really struggling with something or a student, someone is there to help out and give ideas. My team really seems to share ideas and [we] always talk about what we can do.” Like other study participants, Caroline singled out the connection between professional collaboration and personal closeness. “The fact that we are all close and get along makes us better teachers.”

### **Principal**

Every participant, regardless of which of the four schools represented in the study, referenced an appreciation for the support received from their principals. Table 3 captures the participants’ broader perspective regarding the supportive behaviors of their principals.

Table 3: *Supportive Principal Behaviors*

Participant	Participant Description of Supportive Behavior
Helen Edwards	We have had a lot of support in the SLO writing process.
Alicia Frank	My principal is always there when I need her even though she has a lot of building and district responsibilities.
Christine Fuller	Good relationship over time. He has been really supportive.
Trisha Miller	She would do anything for her staff. She goes above and beyond for us.
Abby Nelson	She is our support system. She recognizes staff members' strengths.
Betty Newman	She is super supportive. Great principal.
Caroline Sanders	My principal is fabulous. He is approachable.
Brianna Smith	Evolving leader. I am willing to go to him and work together.
Faye Sullivan	My principal is open to listen and responsive to my ideas.
Debbie Thomas	Absolutely love my principal. She is so supportive.

The participants recognized the influence the principal had on the culture within their schools. A culture of collaboration among the teachers depended on the approachability and support offered to teachers by the principal.

Part of the principal's role is to place teachers into positions that fit their skills. Abby shared how the principal recognized her strengths and helped to settle Abby into a teaching position that has allowed Abby to have the most success.

I think our administrator is very supportive of all that takes place. My principal is a support system. If anyone needs anything she is there. I started in the district as an EBD (emotional behavioral disabilities) teacher for one year. I knew it wasn't a fit for me. My prior experience was learning disabilities, and she saw that in me. She was able to find a position and kind of foster my move to general education. I think that shows you her support. It would have been much easier for her to keep me in a world that I maybe wasn't fit for than to move me into a position where there's hundreds of applicants.

Principals are also an important part of teachers' problem-solving teams.

Debbie said, “If I have a question or want the principal to come in and help me with something, the principal is like a little hummingbird, all over the place.” For example, Debbie describes herself as “technology challenged,” and related how she asked her principal “for some help in doing a self-assessment for writing. . . . Our principal said, ‘Right away. I will take that home tonight and do it up for you.’ . . . The support is unbelievable.”

Like Debbie, Brianna commented on the important role the principal plays in collaborating with teachers to solve problems at an administrative level. “We call our principal our ‘getter-doner,’” she said. “We need to do [something] and she figures out how it is going to happen.” As an example, she cited a situation in which a long-term substitute was brought in at her grade level to fill in for a teacher on maternity leave. Brianna’s team told their principal, “We want to have time to sit down and map out our writing, [and] figure out with the new Common Core Standards how this whole thing is going to look so the substitute knows what to teach. Our principal said, ‘we’ll figure it out and make it work,’ and she did.”

Another element of the principal/teacher relationship that the interviewees discussed was the principal’s respect for the teacher’s professional judgment. Betty praised her principal’s support of her pen pals project, for example. In a similar vein, Alicia stated, “I felt my principal was there when I needed her, but she knew I was doing my job.” Part of that respect comes through in the recognition by the principal of a teacher’s achievements and potential. Christine, for example, remarked on her principal’s recognition of “the efforts of my team to develop independent readers. [That] made me feel good.” Likewise, Debbie recounted that her “principal recently recognized my love

for learning and my job. That to me was a pat on the back.” Caroline commented on her appreciation of her principal for recognizing her other talents. “I am on some committees, [so] obviously my principal thinks that I can do this. That makes me feel pretty satisfied.” A final aspect of the professional respect between principal and teacher came through in Brianna’s comment about how her principal had redistributed mundane tasks in the school. “Our principal has done a really good trying to take things off our plates--clerical tasks such as folding and stuffing report cards, making copies, and entering data that can be done by office support.” Such moves allow teachers to focus on teaching, and communicate the principal’s understanding of the teacher’s role.

Just as the participants commented on how teacher-to-teacher collaboration spilled over into personal closeness, they also noted how a principal’s support in their personal lives contributed to principal-teacher collaboration. Brianna told the story of a day when “one of my kids had a music program on the same day as my students’ music program. [My principal] made sure I was able to see my child’s program. That makes me a better teacher, because I can be a mom and a teacher at the same time.”

Aside from the word “support,” teachers used the word “trust” to describe a healthy principal/teacher relationship. Helen, for example, described her principal as “an evolving leader. My respect for my principal is growing. I find that I am much more willing to go to my principal for things and work collaboratively. It takes time to gain trust.” According to the participants, principals build trust by supporting their teachers’ professional and personal goals in a collaborative manner. And these interviewees believe that the Northwest Community School District principals have positively impacted their teachers, resulting in a positive school culture.

## District level

The participants have different levels of relationship with district-level officials. Some have regular interactions with district-level leaders through their committee work; others primarily focus their attention at the school level and seek guidance from their principals, looking to the district mainly to keep them informed.

The district leaders facilitate forums during the year to keep staff members at all buildings informed. Each participant that spoke about the forums explained them in a fashion similar to Abby: “The forums are more of a telling of what is happening. There is an opportunity for questions, but I do not think that is the agenda behind it. I think it is just so everyone gets the same common message.” Abby, like most of the participants, shared that she does not have a significant relationship with the district office leaders, but does have regular contact with the elementary principals that facilitate elementary-level district meetings.

Even with the more distant relationship between teachers and district officials, Trisha identified how the district leaders make critical decisions that benefit the students and teachers of the district. “I think our school is better off due to the decision made by district leaders to redistrict. The decision was uncomfortable and the population in our city voiced their opinions, and it wasn’t welcomed with open arms. But I think it was a good thing because we have a more balanced population in our city now.”

Caroline has a closer relationship with district leaders thanks to her service on some district level committees. While she admitted that she does not know the superintendent well, “our learning services director is constantly talking with teachers.” She also knows many of the principals at other schools because different principals lead

professional development sessions each time. Caroline summarized the district's efforts by stating, "I think the district does a great job,"

In addition to keeping teachers informed and making decisions about school attendance boundaries, district officials communicate through their policies how much teachers are valued. This role has taken on added importance in the wake of Wisconsin reforms and the heated rhetoric that is often directed toward teachers. Like Caroline, Brianna is actively involved at the district level and she believes that the district has sent the right messages.

I think the district has done a good job of saying they value their teachers. They know that if their teachers are going to stay they have to create a good working environment. They have been spending the last few years trying to make our salaries more comparable. A couple of years ago, we received a 40 percent to the mean raise because our salaries were so far below school districts of comparable size and comparable makeup. And this year, there were pockets of people, typically people with Master's degrees, and people with more experience [who were undercompensated]. There were pay inequities, and they balanced those inequities, so people got raises.

Fairer compensation sent a message to the teachers, according to Brianna, and there was an appreciation for the efforts made to increase teacher salaries.

Compensation packages, of course, are only one piece of the relationship between district officials and teachers. Brianna worries that district level leaders may be out of touch with the day-to-day realities of teachers. She wonders if administrators understand the feeling that teachers are experiencing. "We live at that near drowning state. The



water is just at your nose and nobody is really trying to lower the water level. The water level keeps inching up.” Clearly, the initiatives and mandates imposed by the state and passed down by the district leadership have strained the relationship between district-level officials and teachers.

The interview with Helen provided visible evidence of that strain. It was difficult for her to discuss her perceptions of the district office. At times she would pause and appear to be a bit reluctant to get into too much detail. She expressed that her comfort level as it related to district leaders was stronger when she had previous experiences working with the person. Now, like Brianna, she felt that district officials had lost touch with the reality of the classroom experience.

I think for some of the administration the realities of the situation are lost on occasion. They try to do things like come for lunch and sit and listen to our concerns in the lunchroom. I do not really want to talk about my concerns during lunchtime. I would like to see teachers elected to lead the school for three years. Then someone else is elected. They do this in Singapore or someplace. I just feel like if you are not in the classroom everyday, it is very easy to lose grasp of what it is like and it happens really fast.

The final theme recognized the contributions of the organization’s culture. The Northwest Community School District linked the district to the schools and then to the teachers. This system-wide approach to improving the organization as well as developing its greatest resources, teachers, was recognized by the study participants. Several teachers, including Brianna and Alicia, recognize that building principals are assigned to different district level committees to ensure implementation efforts are

consistent across schools. The committees in turn support building level development. Finally, the embedded collaboration structure at each building develops trusting relationships where teachers take risks to share data and seek collegial input.

The qualitative data from the research interviews uncovered three major themes linked to why elementary teachers are staying in teaching. The first theme revealed the common personal attributes of the interviewees, and the data showed that their backgrounds, positive outlooks, and personality types kept them attracted to the teaching profession. The second theme highlighted the professional challenges faced by teachers, and the interview data showed that the participants have come to some degree of acceptance of the changes in the education environment by focusing on their classrooms and their schools, the arenas where they have more control. Finally, the third theme illuminated how the organizational culture impacts the participants perceived quality of professional relationships with administrators. The data showed that the strength of these professional and personal ties, which grew weaker as the relationship moved further away from the classroom, were an important factor in the participants positive workplace perceptions. The data will be further analyzed in chapter five when the research study analysis is provided.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Education funding and policy, both at the federal and state level, have created increased stress onto the teaching force. Federal education funding is provided to each state based on criteria established under ESEA. The most recent reauthorization of ESEA occurred in 2001 when then President Bush signed the NCLB Act. As states realized they were not going to reach the required 100% proficiency for all students in the areas of math and literacy, states began to apply for waivers. In order to secure federal funding states were required to link educator evaluations and student outcomes. At the same time as new evaluation systems were required for teachers, some states were seeking solutions for budget deficits. Wisconsin among other states chose to make changes to the collective bargaining law as a strategy to cut the budget deficit. As a result, in Wisconsin Act 10 ended collective bargaining for public school employees and Act 166 required an evaluation of educator effectiveness. The new legislation passed within 13 months of each other creating a new work environment for teachers.

The purpose of this study was to describe elementary teacher perceptions as to why they choose to remain in the teaching profession amidst the legislative reforms that impact their wages, benefits, and working conditions. The study included ten elementary teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience who were recommended by the building principal as having a positive impact on student achievement or recommended by a participant during the study. Nationally between 30% and 50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003). The research criterion of a minimum of five years teaching meant

that all the participants passed the initial three to five year threshold and worked as teachers before and after recent controversial educational policy passed.

After reviewing the transcripts and field notes collected, three principal themes emerged along with thirteen sub-themes. The first theme, teacher attributes, included sub-themes of drawn to children, passion, positivity, routines and structure, and concern for new teachers. The second theme, professional challenges, included the following sub-themes, time needed to meet demands of the job, pace of change, political realities, public perception, and curiosity about other careers. The third theme, organizational culture, was captured through the sub-themes of colleagues, principals, and district-level leadership.

The study applied the qualitative basic interpretive strategy permitting findings to naturally emerge based on the teachers' perceptions. Participant interviews were transcribed and field notes reviewed to allow the researcher to understand how participants make meaning of their work environment and profession (Merriam, 2002). Since the researcher served as the primary data collection instrument, the study provided teachers the opportunity to have their lived experiences captured and for the researcher to analyze the data and provide descriptive findings. The open-ended questions and probes allowed the teacher participants to share opinions, feelings, perceptions and knowledge (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002, 2004; Patton, 2002). The analysis of the findings concluded that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation lead teachers to remain in the job. In order to ensure teachers continue to find satisfaction in the job, the changing education environment as perceived by teachers must be considered.

The study investigated the primary research question: Why are elementary teachers remaining in the profession amidst legislative reforms that impact their wages, benefits, and working conditions? Additionally, three attending questions were considered. The questions were:

1. What factors contribute to teachers remaining in the profession?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of the changes to their personal and professional lives?
3. How do teachers perceive the profession since 2010 legislative reforms?

Research questions were designed in a way to indirectly explore teacher perceptions based on literature associated with job satisfaction, motivation, and teacher retention. The findings and analysis identify potential considerations related to teacher motivation leading to job satisfaction.

### **Discussion of Findings Related to Research Questions**

Exploring the perspectives of current elementary teachers allowed the researcher to develop recommendations regarding critical issues facing teachers today. As districts consider how they attend to issues of compensation and teacher effectiveness they must also work to ensure teachers remain satisfied and motivated to do the work. The findings indicate that the teaching profession presents new challenges and greater individual teacher accountability. Since the study only spoke to teachers who actively teach, the discussion draws from their perceptions and interprets their feelings. One might infer that, if the work environment continues to change, teachers may be less drawn to the profession and teachers currently teaching may reconsider their chosen career and seek employment in a different career.

## **Teacher Retention Factors**

The job of a teacher is neither easy nor mundane. Teachers are asked to serve many roles when working with students and families, while conforming to the institutional expectations. In fact, teachers who participated in the study shared that the roles they play could be lawyer, nurse, counselor, judge, mom, and dad, as well as teacher. Using the skills and strategies from various roles, teachers are able to further develop the students they teach. Central to why the participants enjoy their job is their own belief that they make a difference and have some autonomy regarding day-to-day classroom decisions. Both self-determination theory and self-efficacy theory tenants are relevant to why the participants remain teaching today. Additionally, collective efficacy and mastery learning were evident as participants shared their desire to learn together, strengthen their school community, and seek guidance for their professional development.

The participants portrayed a high level of self-efficacy and were driven more intrinsically by what they believed they could do to support children, than extrinsically by what they would receive as a result of their work. The findings indicated that their motivation aligned more to intrinsic factors such as working with students and personal growth, versus the extrinsic factors of school and district policies, working conditions, and salary. In fact, two participants referenced the job as “a calling” while others simply stated that they loved what they did and saw the job as a noble profession. Participants referenced their primary reason for choosing the career as an opportunity to help children.

Additionally, the participants appreciated that consistent curriculum standards are in place, yet they have flexibility in how they choose to teach. The use of collaborative

meetings and planning sessions helped participants to further develop their skills while learning from and with peers. However, classroom autonomy did present some challenges. The flexibility required more time by the participants to determine the strategies and materials that are most effective for the students they serve, further taxing the time demands participants felt. Ultimately, participant job satisfaction reflected intrinsic motivational factors rather than the extrinsic working conditions.

The participants were motivated differently, yet still intrinsically, when it involved their own growth. When it came to furthering their knowledge and skills, participants focused less on believing they were capable and more on seeking clarity and direction. The literature of achievement-goal theory supports the help-seeking nature of the teachers (Butler, 2007). The ongoing collaborative opportunities teachers have to hone their craft supports a mastery approach to learning where challenges are presented and support is provided. On the contrary, if compensation packages transition to rating teachers, the teachers may approach learning from the ability goal approach and seek to place blame on others for struggles and insufficient student progress, therefore avoiding help and support. The participants' perspectives aligned with mastery learning. Nine participants shared examples of challenges and the enjoyment of working with others to successfully tackle the challenge.

Collectively, teachers were positive about their work and attentive to their career choice providing a sense of job satisfaction. Each participant expressed a sincere dedication to helping children and an appreciation for the efforts of both their colleagues and principals. Working in an environment focused on meeting the needs of the students

helped each of them cope with the growing demands of the job. Additionally, the only reason participants cited that they would leave the career was retirement.

The traditional notion of job satisfaction indicates that the employee is satisfied and the work is acceptable (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). This context does not capture the level of excitement and commitment conveyed in the interviews. Work engagement, a deeper perspective to satisfaction, captured the level of motivation perceived by the teachers. Factors that contributed to work engagement are intrinsic in nature (Kahn, 1990). The participants conveyed a genuine excitement generated from the intrinsic rewards of working with people. At times the participants' passion was visibly evident through smiles, laughter and crying while they shared why they enjoy the teaching profession.

Teachers reaching a level of job engagement also are able to endure the difficult times (Kahn, 1990). Participants shared challenging realities related to data collection and the exposure of their data to the school board and public. The participants worried that they would be judged without a deeper understanding of what the data means relative to each student. The implementation of increased collaboration time to review data and determine action plans provided a level of support and comfort to the teachers, resulting in further engagement and commitment by the participants to improve learning for their students. The efforts of the participants and support of the principals to implement interventions resulted in better data that will ultimately be displayed to the district school board and local community. As described in the findings, participants valued how both people and structures, such as collaboration, nurtured a positive professional culture.



The study findings indicated that participants recognize that their work environment is changing. The adoption of the CCSS, changes to collective bargaining resulting in less take home pay, state mandated evaluation of teachers including professional practice standards and student outcome results, new compensation packages, and the new value-added state assessment present new challenges to teachers already struggling with the teaching demands. Even though participants conveyed that the job was stressful, required a significant amount of time, and at times was exhausting, the participants did not demonstrate a level of burnout referenced in the research (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Additional research could focus on the degree of stress to determine the potential for emotional exhaustion, burnout and depersonalization. The teachers interviewed remained positive about the opportunity to teach the children.

The findings indicate that the participants continue to value the intrinsic rewards their jobs provide more than being overwhelmed by the extrinsic pressures. This is evident by the fact they are remaining in the profession even though they are putting more time into the job. A possible interpretation is that teachers who enjoy teaching the most also put the most effort into the teaching and preparation for it. These teachers may therefore also experience the highest time pressure (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Considering that the participants in the study are identified as having a positive impact on student achievement and referenced their concerns regarding the increasing time commitment of the job, this research is relevant.

### **Legislative Reforms Impact the Personal and Professional Lives of Teachers**

The findings identified several potential challenges that could result in teacher burnout, which may lead to teachers leaving the profession. To this point the challenges

have not resulted in the participant teachers leaving or sincerely considering leaving. However, it has led to three participants struggling to recommend the profession to potential teachers. Therefore, it seems that there could be a point where continual changes and time demands coupled with public scrutiny leads teachers identified as having a positive impact on student achievement to leave the profession.

Participants indicated that there are high expectations to ensure each student's learning needs are being met. Three participants shared how student results are made public, creating additional pressure. In order to support students, teachers have changed not only what they teach but also how they teach. Instruction focuses on small group instruction and student exploration, requiring teachers to take more time for the lesson design and preparation. Participants expressed great concern for the time it takes to prepare and instruct. The findings indicate that participants appear to feel that no matter how much time and effort they put forth they did not feel satisfied in what they were able to accomplish. According to Liu and Ramsey (2008), stress from poor working conditions had the strongest influence on teachers' job satisfaction and they noted that inadequate time for planning and preparation and a heavy teaching workload reduced satisfaction from teaching.

Additionally, seven participants referenced the impact the job is having on their families. Participants shared they feel obligated to work late, on weekends and in the summer in order to complete the required tasks and feel prepared for their day-to-day instruction. As a result, participants feel they are neglecting their families and counting on others to provide the necessary family support. Although their profession does not provide an opportunity for a 50/50 balance of work and family, many participants

recognized their current approach to teaching has diminished time with their families and they desire a better balance.

With significant pressure to ensure all students are successful, participants continue to provide students a quality learning experience. However, the current education agenda focused on teacher quality may also need to evaluate if current expectations and requirements will cause people interested in becoming a teacher to choose a different career path. Additionally, current teachers may leave the profession due to the increased stress.

Based on numerous responses where participants indicated that they are overworked, exhausted, experiencing excessive time demands, dealing with continuous change, and required to collect ongoing data on their students, the study showed signs that teachers were stressed and that there was potential for burnout. At times participants presented rather cynical attitudes and shared stories of how they felt there was never enough time to tend to all that was needed as a teacher. According to Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, (1996), burnout includes feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. The data indicated that participants expressed feelings aligned with burnout. Even though participants quickly shared that the feelings were short lived and the desire to work with children and make a difference guided their passion to remain in teaching, leaders should be mindful that newly mandated requirements have added stress to teachers.

From the data one might consider how the three factors connected to burnout are impacting teachers. The study indicated that depersonalization, a negative detached attitude toward the persons that one works with, could potentially develop in time

(Kokkinos, 2007). Depersonalization, although not present in the study findings, could impact children as teachers work with children, colleagues, parents and the community. Additionally, reduced personal accomplishment refers to a tendency that teachers evaluate themselves negatively as well as a general feeling that they are no longer doing a meaningful and important job (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). All participants conveyed positive commentary regarding their efforts as a teacher and saw the work they did as important and rewarding. Therefore, the study did not find reduced personal accomplishment to be an issue. However exhaustion, the other central element of burnout, was expressed from all participants. In fact, it was the reason many of the teachers wondered if a different career would leave them less exhausted.

Since self-efficacy beliefs are heavily based on experiences and those experiences influence a person's attitude it is reasonable to consider that teacher burnout may affect teacher self-efficacy. Consequently, the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout is likely reciprocal. Teachers may perceive that they are not an effective teacher after failing to live up to the expectations they place upon themselves to complete all the day-to-day requirements. The stress that develops as a result of the teacher's inability to meet expectations could result in a negative attitude. The findings indicated that participants are experiencing more demands resulting in less time for rest and recovery. One might consider that in order for teachers to give their best effort consistently, time for rest and recovery is necessary.

Participants perceive their role is changing, and wonder if the structure of the school schedule needed to support the changes is not changing enough. This results in additional stress for the teacher. Organizational strategies could be explored to help

teachers complete more work during the school day to lessen the impact to family time. For example, by providing teachers the opportunity to work in professional learning communities the concern about isolation is reduced. Infusing quality time for professional learning communities into the school day structure is one of many possible supports. However, the inclusion of professional learning communities needs to complement the need teachers have for their day-to-day instructional planning and preparation. Although collaborative time is built into the participants' workday, the study indicates that attending meetings and collaborating with colleagues resulted in a lack of time for personal classroom preparation.

The teaching profession has many demands. In fact one of the reasons study participants enjoy the job is the ebb and flow of their work. The job provides a predictable structure with a start and end to each year. In turn, there are times within the year, for example, completion of report cards, parent-student conferences, holidays, concerts, and inclement weather that generate additional pressure. These are followed by times such as the beginning of the year, vacations and end of the school year that release work pressure. However, the duration of significant stressors is significantly greater than the amount of time where the stress is manageable.

The data indicates that when the participants exerted sustained effort to manage demands without adequate opportunity to recover, the demands become a source of strain. Even though participants shared they often work at home and on weekends in an attempt to ensure their students receive quality instruction, there remains too much to do even with the additional preparation on weekends and in the evening. Participants are experiencing acceleration in the number of initiatives being implemented and the pace at

which the changes must occur resulting in less time for rest and recovery (Hargreaves, 2003; Linddqvist & Nordanger, 2006).

As supported by the research, participants expressed similar concerns regarding the challenges that lead to teachers leaving the profession. Teachers' primary reasons for leaving are: accountability, increased paperwork, student attitudes, no parent support, unresponsive administration, low status of the profession, and salary considerations (Tye & O'Brien, 2002; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter & Meisels, 2007). Participants expressed concerns in areas similar to teachers who leave or consider leaving the profession. Eight participants cited concerns for how teacher accountability will impact their lives. Participants worry that their pay will align to student outcomes. Additionally, the data shared may lead parents, administrators and community members to scrutinize their work. However, the participants consistently expressed an appreciation for their students and the support of their administrators.

Recent emphasis on high-stakes testing, teacher accountability for student outcomes and associated paperwork, and public perception increased stress for all participants. One might infer from the job frustrations shared by participants that some participants may choose to leave the profession in the future if working conditions and expectation remain as they are now or further increase.

### **Professional Realities**

Teacher perceptions were focused on two new factors linked to their profession. The mandated requirements associated with educator effectiveness and calls for new compensation models are two significant changes as a result of legislative decisions.

**Educator effectiveness evaluation system.** There is a sense of restlessness among teachers due to the new era of accountability related to teacher effectiveness. In 2010 the United States Department of Education called for an effective teacher in every classroom. To determine the level of teacher effectiveness in Wisconsin, a new evaluation system was put into action at the start of the 2014-2015 school year. In order to receive federal education funds states are required to develop teacher evaluation systems that focus on recognizing, encouraging, and rewarding excellence and providing teachers meaningful feedback about their practice. Even though there is substantial research validating teachers as the most important contributor to student achievement (Goldhaber, 2002), participants are nervous about the personal implications. A rating system that includes student outcomes has never previously been present in Wisconsin. The participants perceive the requirements as an additional responsibility on top of an impossible load of work.

Six study participants expressed concerns about the use of student performance data because it fails to recognize the inherent differences in different classrooms and different schools. The participants were concerned that it might be more advantageous for teacher to work at a school with a higher socio-economic status. Participants from the school with the highest number of students receiving Title I services spoke directly to being accountable for student growth, yet having barriers that teachers in other buildings do not face. Although participants appreciated the validation that they matter, the concern for being judged based on the performance of their students was unsettling. Furthering this concern was the fact that in the future it could potentially be tied to the participants' pay. Research into what teachers feared from evaluations confirmed this

supposition. Emery and Ohanian (2004) “reported that teachers were fearful of what harm or consequences would come to them as a result of test results interpreted incorrectly by principals or district officials” (p. 34). The implementation of this comprehensive reform initiative requires careful planning, roll out, and sustained professional development in hopes of sustaining teacher satisfaction and engagement.

**Compensation models.** Compensation packages are different today, as a result of dissolving collective bargaining for state employees. School districts have traditionally compensated teachers based on the number of years teaching. Some districts only credited teachers for the years taught in the specified district. Additionally, teachers received salary increases based on additional university credits completed. Upon the passing of Act 10 in Wisconsin, districts began to change their strategy for negotiating wages and benefits. Since districts now have the flexibility to develop different compensation approaches, this provides new opportunities and the need to consider potential roadblocks. Although the study findings indicate teachers are concerned with the changes to health insurance and retirement employee contributions, several participants recognized that their district is developing a compensation plan focused on adjusting salaries to be more competitive with neighboring districts. The participants were grateful for the efforts to align salaries, yet they were skeptical of how the salary increases would be allocated, and how much the increases would be in the future.

As a result of Act 10, districts no longer contribute to a teacher’s retirement, making it easier for teachers to choose to leave should a different district offer better salary, benefits or working conditions. An unintended consequence of Act 10 was a new environment similar to free agency in the sports arena. Teachers no longer had benefits



that encouraged them to remain with their employer. Teachers were free to seek out the best compensation package. Although this study indicated teachers are not driven by salary, they do seek to be appreciated and valued. The participants confirmed they felt less pressure regarding finances due to having a spouse/significant other with whom they share financial responsibilities. With this in mind, districts may want to consider what they include in the new compensation packages. In order to avoid the increased costs of hiring new teachers and providing the necessary induction, districts may be better served to ensure quality-working conditions with fair compensation in an attempt to retain teachers.

Efforts to retain teachers are fiscally important to the district. The teachers who participated in the study indicated they understood the initial efforts regarding compensation, yet were concerned about how the requirements attached to state mandated educator accountability might impact their salaries in the future. Vroom's (1964) theory of job satisfaction supports the intent of educator effectiveness. According to Vroom's research, the teachers who provide extra effort leading to improved performance merit recognition and reward. The degree to which the district's rewards satisfy the teacher's goals determines if the rewards are personally attractive. The data from the study indicates, reaching the children, contributing to the profession, personal recognition from the principal, and recognition from parents are the rewards teachers most appreciate. Therefore, maintaining the factors that current teachers value may ensure a higher rate of retention.

The data indicated that recognition and rewards are important to teachers participating in this study. However, the context of recognition focused on small acts of

appreciation rather than financial rewards. It appeared that participants were frustrated by the changes in their take home pay but did not express desire for increased pay as a reward. One must wonder if that is the result of talking with veteran teachers who never experienced performance driven salary increases. It is difficult for the teachers to conceptualize what the changes will mean individually as salaries have always been driven by years of experience and earning additional college credits.

Teacher compensation is no longer driven by years of experience or additional course work. According to Goldhaber (2002), years of experience and education level account for 3% of teacher quality, whereas the intangible aspects such as enthusiasm and skill in conveying knowledge, account for 97% of teacher quality. Policy makers must consider how to sustain a work environment that promotes job engagement in an era of educator effectiveness accountability and changing compensation models.

### **Implications**

Based on the research findings, current efforts to change teacher compensation packages, and national and state teacher effectiveness mandates, school districts may consider strategies that will increase the likelihood that their teachers remain teaching within the district. It is recommended that districts ensure a quality work environment by supporting the implementation of required initiatives and avoiding the implementation of unnecessary new practices and policies. Additionally it is recommended that districts review the interviewing and hiring procedures for teacher candidates. Efforts to sustain or improve teacher retention help to solidify instructional practices and benefit the financial stability of the district.

As the findings indicated, teachers are struggling to balance all of the responsibilities placed upon them from district leadership. As school district leaders seek to sustain a motivated work force, leaders should consider how to support teachers by providing structures and strategies for adjusting to the ever-changing work environment. It is recommended that districts review current practices and determine if the practices are relevant. Additionally, consideration should be given to how the district is supporting the personal health of the employees. A review of practices and policies can shape an action plan for the future focused on student success and motivated teachers.

As districts review hiring strategies, an interview protocol that includes questions aligned with the key attributes from the research study would allow administrators to compare candidate responses to key factors important to why teachers are remaining in the profession. Industry developed interview tools are available that include most of the attributes identified in the study, however, administrators may choose to develop a protocol or screening tool of their own focused on the attributes identified in this study as part of the strategic hiring process. Additionally, school districts and teachers may consider working together to promote the teaching profession within the community and state they live, in an effort to improve public perception.

Teachers need to be active in the local community sharing their day-to-day teaching experiences, communicating the complexity of the job, and highlighting the contributions teachers make to increase student learning. Historically, communication regarding the work environment was left to union leadership. Although communicating a broader message from the union may be helpful, personalized experiences by the teachers will increase the number of people being educated regarding the realities of teaching

today. As a result, greater understanding by the families they previously served or currently serve may improve the negative public perception teachers are feeling. Hiring and retaining quality teachers must be a collaborative effort.

Improving teacher retention rates will allow districts to allocate dollars away from hiring and training costs and more toward student achievement. A study on teacher turnover conducted by the Texas Center for Educational Research (TSBEC) (2000) reported that it costs Texas between \$8,000 and \$48,000 for each beginning teacher who leaves. The turnover costs show a large range due to the use of five different industry models. The larger figure considers separation costs, replacement of hiring costs, training costs and learning-curve loss. Even with considering the conservative amount of \$8000 the costs of new teachers leaving, across the United States is costing billions of dollars each year. Now we must consider how the cost will increase when teachers with five or more years of experience begin to leave, since their salary is higher than a new teacher and the basic method for estimating cost of turnover involved a percentage of the leaver's annual salary the financial loss to districts will be greater (Texas Center of Educational Research, 2000). The implications from this study call for teacher action to re-establish the teaching profession as a respected career, and administrative action to retain quality teachers.

### **Organizational Considerations: Hiring and Working Conditions**

A proactive strategy to improve teacher retention is strategic hiring practices with consideration given to research recommendations. Hiring is comprised of five distinct steps: recruitment, screening, selection, job offer and securing the candidate. Each of the steps results in additional costs to the district. Beyond salary costs to review candidates

and execute the interview process there are costs incurred if a district chooses to use a proprietary tool such as TeacherInsight. At the local, state and national level there remains a debate about what constitutes an effective teacher. Individual districts and school administrators differ in their definitions of effectiveness and thus look for different characteristics in an applicant (Rutledge, Harris, Thompson & Ingle, 2008). However, with the federally mandated teacher effectiveness requirements, local, state and national education leaders now have standards and indicators to describe what it means to be an effective teacher. Even with mandated professional practice standards, hiring quality teachers will present challenges. According to Rutledge et al. (2008), school districts reported using a number of different tools to ascertain information about a candidate; however, the interview was considered the most important tool. Theel and Tallerico (2004) find the substance of response given by the candidate and a sense of chemistry between the candidate and the interview team to be the qualities principals value most highly. Gallup's Teacher Perceiver (TPI) provides a scripted interview protocol that measures social intelligence. The questions are open-ended and are designed to get interviewees to express themselves on job-related issues (Young & Delli, 2002). Delli and Vera (2003) find that more than 1,200 public school districts use the TPI.

Districts that choose to craft their own interview questions would benefit from behavior-based interview (BBI) questions. Clement (2008) states, "Based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance, the BBI style uses specific questions based on the candidates' skills, background, and experience to determine if they can do the job" (p. 44). Good teachers know subject matter, how students learn, how to motivate, how to manage, and how to assess. They use a variety of teaching

methods and know how to reach students with diverse needs. They also are team players, have strong interpersonal and communication skills, are well organized and enthusiastic (Clement, 2008). Study attributes findings of collaboration, structure and positivity parallel the BBI key areas. Additionally, the findings recommend including questions to evaluate the candidate's desire to be a teacher. The questions would seek to discover the candidate's perspectives regarding children, peers and his/her own passion. People who can describe previous experiences with a particular topic are equipped to deal with that topic in the classroom and school environment. Clement (2008) stated, "The use of behavior based interviewing can lead to better hiring and retention, as this interviewing style strives to ascertain the performance skills needed to do the job, and to determine if the candidate possesses those skills" (p. 47). Crafting behavior based questions aligned to the key attributes of the study increases the probability of hiring teachers who possess the dispositions of the teachers remaining in teaching today.

Although motivation is an individual and personal process, it is also significantly influenced by the contextual and organizational factors (Chalofsky and Krishna, 2009). In an effort for districts to validate the importance of hiring and sustaining quality teachers districts consider two organizational tools. Districts use TeacherInsight as part of the hiring protocol intended to hire the best teachers. Additionally, districts encourage teachers to participate in the National Board certification as confirmation of possessing key skills and dispositions of high quality teachers. However neither tool makes a direct correlation to the attribute of teacher positivity. A general positive demeanor was present in each study participant. The trait resonated throughout the course of the study. The

other attributes identified in the study were found to correlate to questions asked in the TeacherInsight protocol.

It is accurate to state that candidates need to show that they have the technical skills and knowledge appropriate to teach students. But studies at the organizational level show that organizational coherence leads to more effective schools with more content teachers and higher student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Loius, Marks & Kraus, 1996; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001), implying that organizational cohesion is important and can lead to positive working conditions. There is a direct link between the teachers in a specific school and the principal who leads the school as teachers have consistent communication and connection with principals; therefore, the principal should be involved in the interviewing and selection of teachers he/she supervises.

It is important for the building principal to have a voice in staffing his/her school. As evidenced in the findings, the participants expressed an appreciation for how their principals nurtured a collaborative environment. Involving the principal and possibly teacher leaders in the hiring process may increase the likelihood that teachers hired complement the current staff as well as align to the attributes identified in the study. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) found that a school's collective efficacy is dependent on the functioning of the school's principal. Principals are able to select new teachers that add to the professional chemistry of the current staff and strengthen the operational culture of a school. The study findings align to Skaalvik and Skaalvik's findings as the research participants recognized their principals as important to the success of the school. In addition, the participants recognized a collaborative environment as an organizational

factor that keeps them in the profession. This leads one to consider the significance of hiring staff who value collaboration, demonstrate a natural inclination to be positive and are a good fit for the school culture may help with teacher retention.

However, teacher retention factors go beyond the hiring practice. In fact, research indicates that the job related stress teachers face can result in burnout. Based on the data from the study, principals could survey staff regarding their time commitment to job responsibilities and their abilities to balance work and family to gain clarity around the external pressures and gain feedback regarding the level at which employees are feeling a sense of concern for family. This data could then be shared at the district level to be used when developing a strategic plan regarding their teachers' work environment and teacher retention.

### **Teacher Advocacy Within the Community**

As a result of recent legislative reforms receiving significant public attention, the job of a teacher has been highly scrutinized. The teaching profession is experiencing a significant amount of public attention and pressure to ensure all students are succeeding. As judgments are placed on the quality of public education, teachers are feeling devalued. In order to change public perception teachers need to be more active in sharing the contributions they make on a daily basis. In the past, district union leadership would advocate on behalf of their members. The advocacy focused on working conditions and teacher efforts in general. However, the union is a larger entity. The voice of the union is too generalized to connect to the individual parents within the schools that hold a vested interest and can be influential. Therefore, to ensure local communities receive clear and consistent information teachers must consider how to advocate for themselves



and the profession. Without teachers informing others about the job and its responsibilities teachers will continue to internalize the scrutiny causing stress to their personal and professional lives.

The education profession continues to receive attention at the national and state level due to changes in education policy and practice. In Wisconsin, tension remains between public school teachers and state legislators due to the termination of collective bargaining rights for public employees. As a result, teachers publicly expressed their disappointment by writing editorials in local papers, taking to commentary on social media, and picketing at the state capital. From the perspective of research participants, this activism resulted in local community members developing a negative opinion of teachers. The study discovered that even after time has passed, teachers feel the profession is less respected and appreciated. Participants recognized the need to project what is done in the classroom. "It would help our image," one participant shared. Participants wish people would see teaching as more of a profession. In fact most participants referenced a concern for public opinion, yet no one committed to becoming active in messaging their contributions, efforts, and commitment to student success. Several teachers felt that previously there was greater respect for the profession. What participants did not seem to realize is that in order for the general public to better understand the multiple jobs and responsibilities of a teacher, teachers need to share their voices.

As union leadership at the local district levels looks to find value, perhaps the value is in advocacy of the work of their membership shared by the teachers. The Wisconsin protests indicated that teachers could serve as their own advocates. However,

the approach taken did not yield positive public support. Currently, there is little written on the idea of having teachers individually take a more active role in the messages provided to the community. The recommendation from this study is that teachers individually and collectively grow their advocacy skills. Teachers need to discover ways to share what is taking place in the classroom, as well as the many ways they collect and analyze data. Reaching out on social media platforms could increase the likelihood of reaching different stakeholders. Additionally, attending various school and community events provides teachers a direct connection to the families of their students. It is difficult to pass judgments onto others once relationships are established.

Even though teachers will face obstacles as they take a more active role in communicating the roles and responsibilities of the job, their efforts are needed in order to better educate community members and gain the respect they feel is currently lacking.

The advocacy considerations generated from this study cast teachers as the decision makers without the approval of a union. Today, unions are still a voice for teachers, but no longer hold as much credibility and influence. Union membership has decreased significantly since new regulations calling for annual union ratification. This change could be a tremendous opportunity to have individual teachers take the lead and potentially provide greater influence as they put a face to each message. With the use of social media teachers have the opportunity to share the work and successes with the general public in a real time experience. The challenge presented is that it will take time, energy, resilience and a commitment by teachers.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The study looked to analyze the connection of motivation to elementary teachers remaining in their positions. Although the study was able to connect motivation theory to teacher retention, the study did not specifically investigate each teacher's level of work engagement. Additionally, the study did not include any male teachers. Would the perspective from a different point of view result in different findings? Further study would be required to answer this question. Finally, due to Act 10 in Wisconsin, districts are recruiting teachers and teachers are inquiring about teaching opportunities in different districts. A future study to explore the unintended consequences of Act 10 and teacher retention could be considered.

After reviewing the transcripts and determining the study themes the findings indicated that teachers viewed as having a positive impact on student success viewed their work as more than satisfying. The research findings indicated that all participants intended to continue teaching and felt satisfied in their chosen career. The only consideration for leaving the teaching profession in the next year or two was related to retirement. On the basis of this study alone, it is difficult to conclude that the factors identified from the study are the only factors. It is recommended that further research be completed in the area of teacher work engagement.

Additionally, future research could include middle level and/or high school level teachers. At the middle and high school levels elective course teachers could be considered as well. Broadening the study to reach a greater number of teachers could provide even greater insight as to why teachers are remaining in the profession.

In addition to broadening the study to include other disciplines and grade levels, seeking the voice of teachers who have left their teaching positions could also bring clarity to the issue of retention. District implementation of exit surveys for teachers could confirm the findings of this survey and/or discover additional implications. This new educational environment encourages school districts to be strategic in the hiring and supporting of staff and provides teachers the opportunity to take action and advocate for conditions that support job engagement and against conditions that create exhaustion. Adjusting to the new expectations of teaching will not be easy, but efforts need to be made in an attempt to avoid quality teachers facing burnout.

Beyond the context of this study, which took place in a district where resources were abundant and student achievement scores were high, there are additional research considerations. Replicating this study in urban and rural districts could provide a deeper understanding as to why teachers are remaining in the profession while facing challenges specific to the context of the urban or rural district setting. Why are teachers who work in more challenging environments remaining? Would the study results reveal significant differences? How might teachers in districts that are identified as not meeting expectations perceive their jobs? Are there commonalities that are present regardless the challenges teachers face? Additionally, as new compensation packages are developed future research could seek to uncover the impact of the benefits and how the benefits were determined.

Finally, while the findings of a study of ten elementary teachers cannot be applied universally, the study provided interesting insights for consideration and creates

opportunity to further explore why teachers are remaining in the profession since legislative reforms that have impacted their wages, benefits and working conditions.

### **Conclusions**

This study responded to the lived experiences of today's teachers who are working in a new era where teachers no longer negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions. This new environment was the result of federal mandates and changes to state laws. This new era increased educator professional practice accountability, included student outcomes in the evaluation process, and changed the general structure for compensation. The study revealed that teachers who are identified as making a positive impact on student achievement have similar dispositions. The teachers care deeply about the students they serve. They internalize the public perception of their profession, struggle to maintain a healthy balance of personal and professional responsibilities, and are hopeful that mandates and accountability will not be too great of a burden. In conclusion, to succeed in providing a quality-learning environment for children, districts will need to hire and train teachers wisely and limit the challenges teachers face.

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## Appendix A: Consent to Participate

Informal Consent  
UW-Milwaukee

IRB Protocol Number: 14.048  
IRB Approval Date: September 11, 2013

### University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

#### Consent to Participate in Research

#### **Study Title: Should I Stay or Should I Go? Wisconsin Elementary Educators Describe Teacher Longevity**

**Person Responsible for Research:** Catherine M. Clarksen

**Study Description:** The purpose of this research study is to examine the lived experiences of Wisconsin elementary public school teachers who have a minimum of five years of teaching experience. Currently, there is a significant amount of research from former teachers once they leave the profession, but not from current teachers who are staying in the profession. Approximately 12-15 subjects will participate in this study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to approximately 20 interview questions. You will be asked to participate in two interview sessions. Each interview session will be audio recorded and last 45-60 minutes. A third interview will be utilized if necessary and with the consent of the participant.

**Risks / Benefits:** Risks that you may experience from participating are considered minimal. There are no costs for participating. There are no benefits to you other than the reward of sharing your stories and contributing to further research about teacher longevity.

**Confidentiality:** Your information collected for this study is completely confidential and no individual participant will ever be identified with his/her research information. A transcriptionist will be transcribing the recorded interviews. Data from this study will be saved on pantherLINK a secure data storage system at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The audio recordings, field notes and signed consent form will be stored for a minimum of three years and transcripts will be stored up to five years. Catherine Clarksen will be the only person to have access to the information. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at

any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. There are no known alternatives available to participating in this research study other than not taking part.

**Who do I contact for questions about the study:** For more information about the study or study procedures, contact Catherine Clarksen at [clarksen@uwm.edu](mailto:clarksen@uwm.edu).

**Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject?** Contact the UWM IRB at 414-229-3173 or [irbinfo@uwm.edu](mailto:irbinfo@uwm.edu).

**Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older. By signing the consent form, you are giving your consent to voluntarily participate in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B: District Access Request**

Dear *(name of district administrator)*:

I am sending this email to you today to request the opportunity to complete my PhD research in your school district. I am a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee preparing to complete a qualitative research study.

The purpose of this study is to describe the factors impacting teacher longevity. Specifically, the study seeks to inform readers about the mindset of elementary teachers who have remained in their classroom teaching positions for at least five years. The research may also further inform principals, district administrators and policy makers of what factors may influence elementary teacher longevity.

This is a confidential research study. Your district, your principals, your schools, your teachers, as well as, yourself will remain anonymous. Participant information is de-identified prior to the completion of my dissertation and all information collected is securely stored. You will have access to my study upon approval by my dissertation committee.

Research participants will need a minimum of five years of teaching experience and be viewed as motivated by the building principal. Requiring a minimum number of years of teaching increases the likelihood that the teacher has a solid understand of the art of teaching, as well as, a developed level of expertise. Each participating building principal will be asked to submit a list of potential research participants. During the first round of interviews I would ask participants if he/she would recommend that I speak to any other teachers in the building according to the identified criteria. In the end the research study would involve 12-15 teachers in your district. I would hope to speak with three participants from each of the three participating schools and then randomly select an additional three participants from the list developed from teacher recommendations.

I am excited at the possibility to learn from your teachers. Upon receiving your approval, I will contact each elementary building principal and request his/her participation. Once I receive confirmation from three principals in your district I will proceed to request recommendations from the participating principals.

I would be happy to answer further questions and/or discuss my research efforts with you upon your request. I look forward to hearing from you and moving forward with my research in the *(name of district)* School District.

Sincerely,

Catherine M. Clarksen

## APPENDIX C: REQUEST TO PRINCIPALS FOR TEACHER PARTICIPATION

Hello \_\_\_\_\_. This is Cathy Clarksen. I am a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I have recently contacted \_\_\_\_\_ and received approval to complete a research study in your school district. I am calling today to request your participation.

The purpose of this study is to describe the longevity of veteran teachers. Specifically, the study seeks to inform readers about the mindset of elementary teachers who have been teaching for at least five years. Research may also inform principals, district administrators and policy makers of what factors may influence elementary teacher longevity.

I am requesting that you recommend teachers in your building I might contact to request an interview for the study. There are two criteria I need you to consider prior to providing the recommendations.

Selection criteria:

1. Participants would need a minimum of five years of teaching experience.
2. You should perceive participants as having a direct impact on positive student achievement/outcomes.

Once I receive your recommendations I will randomly select teachers from your building to participate in the study. It is a voluntary study so if a teacher prefers not to participate I would then select another teacher from your recommendations.

This is a confidential research study. Your district, your school, your teachers, as well as, yourself will remain anonymous. Participant information is de-identified prior to the completion of my dissertation and all information collected is securely stored.

Are there any questions I might answer?

Would you be willing to participate?

Verbal agreement received: Principal's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal agreement denied: Principal's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

UW-Milwaukee Doctoral Student  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

## APPENDIX D: Request to Prospective Participants

Hello, my name is Cathy Clarksen. I am a doctoral student at UW-Milwaukee. Recently I received permission to conduct my PhD research in the \_\_\_\_\_ School District. I am writing today to ask you to consider participating in the study.

The purpose of my study is to describe the longevity of veteran elementary teachers. Specifically the study seeks to inform readers about the mindset of elementary teachers who have remained in teaching for at least five years. The research may also inform principals, district administrators and policy makers of what factors may influence elementary teacher longevity.

I asked your principal to provide a list of teachers that meet the criteria of my research study.

Selection criteria:

1. Participants must have a minimum of five years of teaching experience.
2. Participants are perceived as having a direct impact on positive student achievement/outcomes by the building principal.

As one of the teachers identified in the random selection process, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. There are two interviews of approximately 45-60 minutes involved in the process.

Prior to the start of the first interview I would ask that you review the attached consent form in case you have further questions. If you agree to participate please sign both copies and bring one copy along to our first meeting.

This is a confidential research study. Your district, your school, as well as, yourself will remain anonymous. Participant information is de-identified prior to the completion of my dissertation and all information collected is securely stored. I will share each transcribed interview with you to ensure I accurately captured your thoughts.

I am hopeful that you will consider participating. I would be happy to answer any questions. Feel free to call me at [920-621-6969](tel:920-621-6969) or email me at [clarksen@uwm.edu](mailto:clarksen@uwm.edu).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Catherine M. Clarksen

Doctoral Student – UW-Milwaukee

**APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol #1**

Time:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Number of years as a public school elementary teacher:

Number of years in this district/school?

Position:

Introduction: The purpose of this first interview is to get to know you, your professional background and thoughts on teaching.

1. Tell me about your educational background.
2. Tell me more about your licensing/teacher education preparation program.
3. How did you determine teaching as your profession? (How did you get to \_\_\_\_\_ elementary school?)
4. Describe your school. (Describe strengths and/or challenges).
5. Describe a typical day at work?
6. How do you describe the work/preparation involved with your job?
7. If asked how do you describe the work you do?
8. Describe a time in your teaching career you felt the most inspired.
9. How do you think your colleagues would describe you?
10. You have been teaching for *X* years. Why have you stayed in the profession?
11. Would you still choose teaching as a profession if you had it to do all over again?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share today?



13. Are there any teachers that you currently work with that have been teaching for five years and that I might find interesting to listen to?

Recommendations:

I would like to send you a transcribed review of our conversation today. Would you prefer I send you a copy in the mail or via a email? Is there an address I may use?

Follow Up Interview: Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX F: Interview Protocol #2**

Time:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

1. To what do you attribute your longevity in the profession?
2. How would you describe your professional relationship with your colleagues (other teachers/staff members)?principal?
3. Are there any conditions that might cause you to leave (the school? The district? The profession)?
4. Tell me about a time you received professional recognition or felt particularly satisfied professionally.
5. How do you deal with professional adversity? Please provide an example.
6. If asked for your perspective, would you recommend teaching as a profession?
7. How have current legislative decisions around ACT 10 impacted you as a teacher?
8. How would you describe your professional relationship with the district office leaders?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share?
10. If necessary, may I follow up with any additional questions? By phone?

Thank you for your time and thoughtful contributions to this research study.

## Curriculum Vitae

Catherine Marie Clarksen

Place of Birth: Green Bay, WI

### Education:

Ph.D. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, December 2014  
 Major: Urban Education, Administrative Leadership  
 Certification: Superintendent, May, 2013

M.A. University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, May 1995  
 Major: Administrative Leadership  
 Certification: K-12 Principal

B.A., St. Norbert College – De Pere, Wisconsin, May 1989  
 Major: Elementary Education

**Dissertation Title:** Why Teachers Stay: Elementary Teachers Share Perceptions of the Job Since Legislative Reforms in Wisconsin

### Professional Experience:

Coordinator, CESA 6 Effectiveness Project, 2013–Present

District Summer School Director, Oshkosh Area School District, 2010-2013

Elementary Principal, Oshkosh Area School District, 2010–2013

Middle School Principal, Kimberly Area School District, 2005-2010

Assistant Middle School Principal, Kimberly Area School District, 2000-2005

Middle School Teacher, Howard-Suamico School District, 2000-1995

Middle School Teacher, Green Bay Area School District, 1991-1995

Middle School Teacher, Chilton School District, 1989 - 1991

### Presentations:

Wisconsin Quality Educator Conference  
 Wisconsin ASCD Conference

Association of Wisconsin School Administrators-SLATE Conference  
Wisconsin Assessment Consortium  
Wisconsin Association for Middle Level Education

**Professional Service:**

Wisconsin ASCD Board of Directors  
Fox Cities YMCA Board of Directors – Awarded the “Key Leader” award 2010