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My Labor Of Love

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MY LABOR OF LOVE

by

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"The satisfaction of teaching extend beyond the academic. Indeed, the most lasting contributions come from rescuing a child from despair, restoring a sense of hope, soothing a discomfort. These are the occasions whose memories last longest because they are often the occasions that matter most. They are the occasions whose importance transcends academic interests. They address the human needs that all of us share."
-Elliot Eisner

Elliot Eisner is Professor Emeritus of Education and Art at Stanford University. This is an abridged version of his 2006 Commencement talk to School of Education graduates and their families.

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CHAPTER ONE

My Labor of Love

Overview of Research

This research explored *How do administrators and teachers with ten or more years of experience at the same State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP) explain their decision to stay with that program and their level of professional fulfillment.* Additionally this research was designed to deepen the understanding of the following secondary questions by researching:

- *How do the participants describe the path that led them to teach at a SAAP and why they stay?*

- *How do the participants describe their preparation during their pre-service program to work with the at-risk population at a SAAP?*

- *How do the participants describe the nature of their on-board training or mentorship at a SAAP?*

- *How do the participants describe their level of professional fulfilment at a SAAP?*

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach searching for detailed narratives from teachers and administrators in a SAAP combined with previous research that lists elements likely to attract, create success, and retain teachers in these programs.

Qualitative data was gathered from four administrators having led a SAAP and three individual educators having taught for ten or more years in a SAAP. The researcher

employed electronic surveys and conducted individual interviews. The testimonies gathered yielded information regarding values, practices, and supports surrounding professional fulfillment. In addition, the narratives were explored for support that professional fulfilment then led to increased teacher retention in SAAPs. Although a great deal of research has been done with teacher attrition and retention in traditional and high-need schools, very little research was identified in the review of the literature specifically focused on educators fulfillment when teaching in SAAPs. The goal of this research was to narrow the gap in research and impact the teaching profession in alternative schools, specifically SAAPs.

Background of the Researcher

There was never any question about the topic of dissertation research. From the start of my doctoral program I knew my research would be related to teachers working with students at-risk of not meeting their graduation date. Specifically, research surrounding educators teaching at-risk students in a SAAP. The primary goal of a SAAP where the research was conducted is to provide options for students to succeed in school. Students are unable to just choose to attend a SAAP, they must qualify to attend. This eligibility criteria is listed under Minnesota Statute 124D.68 and will be thoroughly detailed in Chapter Two (Graduation Incentives Program, 2017). Some qualifiers required for students to attend a SAAP include: being assessed as chemically dependent, being excluded or expelled, pregnant or a parent, physical or sexual abuse, and experiencing mental health problems (Graduation Incentives Program, 2017). I have been an educator

at a SAAP my entire career. I began as a teacher and have now moved into administration.

An Area Learning Center (ALC) is a SAAP that has secondary and middle school programming, serves students from more than one district and provides extended learning opportunities for students to make up lost credits (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014). This devotion to teaching drives me to deliver a quality education to all, especially those at-risk of not meeting their graduation date. My personal experience with at-risk students has been valuable and all encompassing. Essentially, I am in my element when working with students.

Robinson and Aronica (2009) state, "Being in the element and especially being in the zone doesn't take energy away from you; it gives it to you" (p. 93). As a testament to this thought, my social media feeds are full of amazing things going on with the students who needed my guidance when they faced bumps in the road along their educational journey. One of the most rewarding aspects of teaching is polishing rough diamonds. Being a teacher becomes one's identity and may explain an educator's decision to stay at a SAAP and increase their level of professional fulfillment. I have been thanked by former graduates for polishing rough diamonds. Ultimately, being an educator is my identity; it is who I am, not just what I do. According to Stronge (2007) effective teachers of at-risk students display care, interact with students and build relationships, are fair and respectful, have enthusiasm and motivation, and show a positive attitude toward teaching. My pedagogical beliefs striving to teach lifelong education has been the goal of my fulfilling career and I envision a lifetime of educating others. With conviction, studies

(Armor et al., 1976; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989) of outstanding teachers when working with at-risk students share that they are certain they can make a difference in the lives of these students; many educators share this conviction, including myself.

While teaching undoubtedly influences identity, education does as well. The identity, or the positionality an educator embodies is a factor for achieving professional fulfillment. For me, recognizing the years spent as a student at a private Catholic elementary school and the impact it had while growing and learning; allowing me to flourish is crucial. It is a small family oriented, community environment. Growing up slight in stature and very quiet in nature. I am positive I would have fallen through the cracks in a larger system. From my lens, this school community treasured every individual and instilled the importance of serving others, cherishing relationships, and accepting everyone.

In addition to the pieces my elementary school instilled in me, as an adult I am dedicated, encouraging, provide support, and nurture instinctively. These are some of the many aspects of a "good educator" that a variety of researchers (Aronson, 2001; Clubine, Knight, Schneider, & Smith, 2001; Corbett & Wilson, 2004; Ferguson, 2002) have found. Internalizing these values and tenets, I was drawn to work with at-risk students in an alternative setting. A primary motivation for me was to provide the opportunity for these students to feel treasured and valued: wanting to make a difference, impact their learning during their educational journey, striving to build asset-based communities. Because as Block (2009) states, "if we want to make communities stronger, we should study their assets, resources, and talents" (p. 13).

Beyond my personal educational journey and my vast teaching experience, the twenty-plus-years of experience gained on a professional board of alternative educators has made me into the researcher drawn to explore aspects of educational models outside of the traditional setting. This board is the preeminent leader in alternative education (Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs (MAAP), 2016). While serving on the Executive Committee as Secretary, my role is to help maintain the teacher membership lists for each of the nine regions. My membership and leadership roles in this professional organization have allowed me to build relationships and networks with many individuals teaching and working in SAAPs. These connections within the SAAP community, as well as my relationships with State Department personnel, have aided in my research goals. Bringing all of these segments in my life together allowed me to collect data in a straightforward manner. In addition, the time invested with individuals associated with the professional organization ensured the data collected was authentic.

Context and Importance

Naturally, as my values and positionality as an educator have formed, it has influenced my research goals and the design of my research. Accordingly, bringing my lens as a veteran SAAP educator, I have witnessed an increase in mental health challenges facing teens, as well as a rise in substance abuse. These factors coupled with teacher shortages have increased the level of my concern for students and produced a greater commitment to ensure teacher's professional fulfilment and retention in SAAPs.

Dillon (2009) describes how the concern with retaining teachers in alternative high schools is also an issue in traditional school settings. The author frames teacher

retention issues as "with one-third of all novice teachers leaving the profession in three years and more than 40 percent leaving within five, some students rarely get the benefit of having an experienced teacher" (Dillon, 2009, p. 27). The number of new teachers leaving the field has caused a bleak reality for schools and made this research on professional fulfillment worth completing.

Given the number of teachers who leave the field, Ingersoll (1999) describes how when school leaders face shortages, they are left to hire less qualified candidates, assign staff to teach a course they are not licensed in, and as a last resort, over-utilize substitute teachers. Having professional experience teaching at a SAAP, has allowed observation of higher retention rates in traditional schools than compared to the lower retention rates in alternative schools. A long-term research objective was to understand what factors could increase teacher retention and professional fulfillment in alternative school so that alternative school leaders across the state do not commit these same erroneous staff assignments that Ingersoll (1999) describes.

Purpose and Primary Research Question

The fundamental research question is, *How do administrators and teachers with ten years or more experience at the same State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP) explain their decision to stay with that program and their level of professional fulfilment.* Motivation for conducting this study was to leave a lasting legacy on the profession of teaching and impact the education delivered to at-risk students in SAAPs. As a long-term teacher at a SAAP my reasons for staying were clear, however as a researcher; I was curious to know what makes others stay. Thus, my purpose for conducting this research

and writing this dissertation involved the elements of ensuring professional fulfillment, attracting, and retaining teachers to work with at-risk students in alternative settings.

Admittedly, my personal goals in life, as well as practical goals, drive me to search for the answers (Maxwell, 2013). Personally, my research agenda is related to my transformation as a leader. In Fall 2018 my role changed from being a full time teacher splitting my time as a classroom teacher and a part time administrator. Having earned my principal license in December 2018 my role changed again in Academic Year 2019/2020 to being the Head Principal. In this new role, I wanted to provide the leadership necessary to retain teachers, find professional fulfillment, and maintain an environment conducive to doing so. In a practical world, this dissertation can support me in filling the hole that exists in current research surrounding teacher retention in alternative high schools. I want this research to be a tool that educators gravitate to.

Additionally, this research will increase educators' understanding of what is at the heart of teachers who stay the course and remain a champion for at-risk students in SAAPs. This research will illuminate what conditions should be in place or part of the school environment to allow teachers to flourish and grow right along with their students. Understanding what conditions are present in schools helps educators continue teaching at a SAAP. Secondary or follow up questions that guided this research are:

- *How do the participants describe the path that led them to teach at a SAAP and why they stay?*

- *How do the participants describe their preparation during their pre-service program to work with the at-risk population at a SAAP?*

- *How do the participants describe the nature of their on-board training or mentorship at a SAAP?*

- *How do the participants describe their level of professional fulfilment at a SAAP?*

These guiding questions provided the pieces of information necessary to implement these strategies.

Conceptually, I do not think teachers are drawn to SAAPs, nor do they remain. This theory has been demonstrated in my role as a teacher, a board member of a professional statewide organization, and as an administrator leading a SAAP. Applicants to open job postings are few and far between, teachers have been given a teaching assignment in a SAAP against their wishes, and/or using their employment in a SAAP as a stepping stone into their desired school district patiently waiting for a teaching position to open in the traditional schools. Teachers should be able to choose to work at a SAAP and remain in the school until they retire. In sum, the primary purpose of this research was to ascertain a better understanding of the relationship that exists between professional fulfillment for teachers, teacher retention, and environmental school characteristics, which then impacts education delivered (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The initial examination of the literature revealed information surrounding teacher retention and high-need schools. Filling in the gaps in the literature surrounding SAAPs is important as we move into the future and continue to see growth with SAAPS. I hope to become a piece of the missing research for SAAPs.

Recommendations

To be sure, this research had purpose, and there were lofty goals. Maxwell (2013) states, "a clear understanding of the goals motivating your work will help you avoid losing your way or spending time and effort doing things that don't advance these goals" (p. 22). A long term goal was for this research to impact universities, school districts, and even legislation. Universities should tailor their preparatory teacher programs to include some knowledge of SAAPs. Post-secondary institutions should also build partnerships with SAAPs to place student teachers into their schools. Both of these initiatives would introduce more novice teachers to this area of education, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) point out that prior knowledge would increase self-efficacy and professional fulfillment in new teachers entering the field. Another long term goal of this research is to create interest for post-secondary educators that can contribute to school communities and professional support for all teachers.

An example of this professional support would be for school districts to make their new teacher mentor and implementation programs include resources for the teachers working with at-risk youth (Huling-Austin, 1990). Furthermore, it is not out of the realm of possibility for this research to impact legislation. In an ideal world, legislation would be passed requiring all teachers to get training to work with at-risk student populations. This training could come in the form of continuing education or professional development. This legislation would be beneficial, as at-risk students are present in all educational settings, not just SAAPs. This exposure to at-risk student populations could entice educators to move to SAAPs to teach. Essentially, the significance of the

information discovered in this investigation could have a state-wide positive impact on professional fulfillment for educators.

Assumptions and Biases

In conducting this research it has become clear that my experience has been so singular it could be detrimental to the research. Being a critical consumer and a thoughtful producer of research is important in this context with the bias that has been built, perhaps causing undo errors to be made. Assumptions involved in this research are: teachers teaching in SAAPs are transient; teachers are not attracted to SAAPs; teachers have not been exposed to alternative schools or at-risk learners; teacher retention impacts the quality of education delivered to students; and having mentor and induction programs will increase teacher longevity and professional fulfillment.

To continue with this train of thought, having never taught in a traditional school setting it was important to heed McMillan and Schumacher's (2010) warning of the importance of being mindful to not commit sampling bias. The authors describe that "sampling bias occurs when the researcher consciously or unconsciously selects subjects that result in inaccurate finding" (p. 143). With this awareness, reining in bias is important during the interview process so the researcher's values are not projected onto the educators being interviewed. Along the same lines, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) highlight how extra caution should be used when choosing the sample set to select a representative group, not just the individuals that will prove the researcher's assumptions.

Indeed, to guard against providing researcher's assumptions, researchers need to be careful to avoid biased words and questions in surveys and interviews, as well as the

solicitation of a certain response or answer they may be unconsciously searching for. A method used in this research design to reduce biased wording was piloting the survey and interview questions before use with participants. Related to this, was also the need to make sure that body language or facial expressions were not inferring or hinting at an answer as interviews were conducted. As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) highlight, educators and researchers have a duty to set the stage for interviews to be sure the participants understand that an honest response is desired, not one they think needs to be heard.

Summary

Having remained in the profession working at a Comprehensive Area Learning Center, peaked the researcher to ascertain why others remain working in a SAAP. This research was meant to disclose what makes some educators engage and thrive in alternative settings with at-risk students and find professional fulfilment. An important aspect of this research was identifying the factors that made my experience so rewarding so that other teachers can share the same experience and other students can feel the same success. What elements successful high-need programs provide that are not present at other alternative schools around the state? What compels teachers to remain teaching in a SAAP? One final goal of this research was to see the teacher longevity percentages improve.

Preview of Chapter Two

The current literature has focused on teacher retention in traditional schools and high-need schools. The guiding question of this research is: *How do administrators and*

teachers with ten years or more experience at the same State Approved Alternative

Program (SAAP) explain their decision to stay with that program and their level of

professional fulfilment. It has been challenging to locate research specifically on SAAPs,

why teachers choose to teach in a SAAP, and why teachers leave a SAAP. Current data

was used in order to capture the educational landscape present when conducting this

research as well as providing the background while acquiring the rich narratives from the

participants. Thus opening the door for more research to follow. To complement the

literature on teacher retention, literature on induction/mentor programs, out-of-field

teaching, student populations in SAAPs, why teachers are attracted to SAAPs, and the

cost of teacher attrition was utilized.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction to Chapter Two

This chapter provides an overview of the current literature relating to teacher retention and professional fulfillment in State-Approved Alternative Programs (SAAP) and some of the contributing factors connected to the growing crisis of recruiting and retaining teachers at SAAPs. The primary research question in this study is: *How do administrators and teachers with ten years or more experience at the same State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP) explain their decision to stay with that program and their level of professional fulfilment.*

My secondary questions are:

- *How do the participants describe the path that led them to teach at a SAAP and why they stay?*

- *How do the participants describe their preparation during their pre-service program to work with the at-risk population at a SAAP?*

- *How do the participants describe the nature of their on-board training or mentorship at a SAAP?*

- *How do the participants describe their level of professional fulfilment at a SAAP?*

Definition of Terms

State Approved Alternative Programs (SAAP) are publicly funded schools for students at-risk of not meeting their graduation date and encompass Area Learning Centers (ALCs), Alternative Learning Programs (ALPs), and Contract Alternatives. With a demand to meet all students' needs, alternative education began. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) (2017a) attributed the creation of SAAPs to various stakeholders calling for a " . . . viable educational option for students who were experiencing difficulty in the traditional system" (Alternative Learning, ⸿ 1). According to the MDE (2017a) the first SAAPs began in 1988 and today represent about 17 percent of Minnesota public school students. The 17 percent encompasses both full-time and part-time students. Targeted Services makes up a large percentage of the total number of students served. The department describes SAAPs as "they are learning-year programs and are funded with General Education Revenue. Students are eligible to generate up to 1.2 Average Daily Membership (ADM) for their district" (MDE, 2017a, Alternative Learning, ⸿ 3). ADM for students in SAAPs is different from students in traditional schools who can generate 1.0 ADM for their districts. To be enrolled in a SAAP students are at-risk of not meeting their graduation date, and are eligible to make up lost credits, hence generating more than 1 ADM. ADM is reported to the state department and funding is reimbursed accordingly.

There are several diverse SAAPs so it is necessary to begin this review of the literature with the clarification of terms and an explanation of the statues of SAAPs in the state where the research took place. According to the MDE (2017b) SAAPs are classified as Area Learning Centers (ALC), Alternative Learning Programs (ALP), Contracted

Alternatives, Independent Study, and Targeted Services. A Comprehensive ALC has

secondary and middle school programming, serves students from more than one district,

provides extended learning opportunities for students to make up lost credits and may

apply to provide Targeted Services. According to the State-Approved Alternative

Programs Reference Glossary (2016) Targeted Services is defined as an Out of School

time elementary and middle/junior high-level program for at-risk students. Programming

occurs on an extended day/year basis. Only ALCs can apply to provide Targeted

Services. Students must have a CLP and services must be provided year round. Students

can generate more than 1.0 ADM (but less than 1.2) when they receive more than the

statute-defined minimum number of instructional hours.

In order to participate in an Independent Study program a student must be

enrolled in an ALC or ALP and be 16 or older. MDE (2017b) highlights that a student

enrolled in an ALC or ALP works independently of their peers on graduation

requirements and progress towards completion at their own rate. Targeted Services,

according to MDE (2014) serve students in kindergarten through eighth grade providing

after school and summer school programming and extended learning is programming that

occurs outside of the core school day or school year (MDE, 2016).

MDE (2017a) defines alternative education as designed for students who are

at-risk of not meeting their graduation date. A commonly used definition of at-risk

attributed to Popp, Grant, and Stronge, (2011) is meaning " . . . students who, because of

various environmental factors beyond their control (e.g., homelessness, high mobility,

poverty), have an increased likelihood of experiencing challenges in attending,

succeeding, and remaining in school"(p. 276). To provide further clarification the various factors beyond the control of students enrolled in SAAPs is based on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) research. Sporleder and Forbes (2016) explain The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) is ongoing research conducted through the collaborative efforts of Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Joining Forces for Children website (2021) indicates there are three categories of ACE factors;

- Abuse,

- Neglect, and

- Household Dysfunction.

The Abuse category includes; physical, emotional and sexual. The Neglect category includes; physical and emotional. The House Dysfunction includes; mental illness, mother being treated violently, divorce, incarcerated relative, and substance abuse.

A important reported outcome of this research as cited in Sporleder and Forbes (2016) is that students who had experienced at least three ACEs were three times more likely to encounter academic failures. These authors also highlight that students with ACEs were also five times more likely to have attendance issues and six times as likely to display behavioral problems.

This clarification of terms is further enhanced by the legislation surrounding alternative programs.

Respectively, SAAPs are governed by the following Minnesota statutes:

- Graduation Incentives Criteria (Appendix A) used to identify at-risk students: Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.68 (Graduation Incentives Program, 2017).

- Continual Learning Plan (CLP) (Appendix B) developed annually for each student to outline the steps necessary for grade promotion and/or graduation: Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.128, Subdivision 3 (Learning Year Program To Provide Instruction Throughout Year, 2017).

- Information to students and families regarding alternative education options (Appendix C): Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.68, Subdivision 6 (Learning Year Program To Provide Instruction Throughout Year, 2017).

This section clarified how SAAPs are defined and their purposes. The next section will describe my passion for SAAPS and this research.

Research Foundation

The foundation for this research stems from my life's work; teaching in a SAAP since 1991 and my continued passion for the students in my school. Additionally, the foundation for this research stems from the teacher retention crisis facing the profession as a whole. Through my review of the research literature, I have found an exhaustive list of studies confirming the statistic that approximately 50% of new educators leave the profession after five years, a factor that cannot be controlled. Low teacher retention rates is worrisome for the researchers Ingersoll and Smith (2003).

The persistent low teacher retention rate is a long term problem that has been the subject of research beginning more than thirty years ago and continues to be an area heavily studied. Given the persistent nature of low teacher retention for this research I

have chosen to focus on high-need schools. This statistic of teacher attrition in and of itself is concerning, and this research will set out to inform and provide rich narratives surrounding professional fulfillment and teacher retention for teachers at SAAPs. The narratives may detail how professional fulfilment and teacher retention can be improved, or at least impacted with suitable training, induction and mentoring programming, administrative support, and community building.

Darling-Hammond (2003) explains the point of this research when referring to the teacher shortage, "the problem does not lie in the number of teachers available; we produce many more qualified teachers than we hire. The hard part is keeping the teachers we prepare" (p. 7). The reality is that school administrators must have enough teachers to fill their classrooms and be able to retain the teachers they have hired.

From this original literature search on teacher retention, individuals and previous research immediately began to materialize. Numerous researchers found substantive evidence corroborating the high number of teachers leaving the occupation. For example, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) write that "in the United States, at least, there is large-scale evidence that 40% of K-12 teachers are currently 'disheartened' with their job" (p. 6). Ingersoll (2001) framed the problem as one of, "rather than insufficient supply, the data suggests that school staffing problems are primarily due to excessive demand resulting from a 'revolving door'--where large numbers of teachers depart their jobs for reasons other than retirement" (p. 525). While the revolving door may be a primary reason for teachers leaving the profession Ingersoll and Smith (2004) determined that the combination of many pieces resulted in nearly 50 percent of teachers leaving before their

six years had begun. The impact of low teacher retention and its impact is also explored by Darling-Hammond (2010).

Darling-Hammond (2010) states, "the uphill climb to staff our schools with qualified teachers becomes steeper when teachers leave in large numbers. Since the early 1990s the annual number of exits from teaching has surpassed the number of entrants by an increasing amount" (p. 7). Corroborating the work of Darling-Hammond (2010) and its impact on learners is Dillon (2009). She writes, "with one-third of all novice teachers leaving the profession in three years and more than 40 percent leaving within five, some students rarely get the benefit of having an experienced teacher" (p. 27). Referring to the exit of teachers from the field as an epidemic is Fisher (2011) who concludes, "this failure to retain teachers is becoming a national epidemic and strategies invoked by school systems are not effective enough to reduce the stress of these novice teachers, thus resulting in their departure from the profession" (p. 10). The poor retention of novice teachers leads Gonzales, Brown, and Slate (2008) to reframe the problem as not an " . . . issue of our nation's teacher shortage, but what must be addressed and examined is the retention issue" (p. 2). This review of the literature provided solid support for the idea that low teacher retention is an issue, there are real negative impacts associated with it and that researchers have been proposing ideas to improve teacher retention.

While combing through this literature on teacher retention, themes or categories of interest began to show themselves: the cost of teacher turnover rates (Watlington, Shockley, Gugliemino, & Felsher, 2010), recruiting techniques, induction and mentor programs (Huling-Austin, 1990; Dillon, 2009), out-of-field teaching (Ingersoll, 1999),

teacher stress and burnout (Fisher, 2011), characteristics of successful teachers and schools (Popp et al., 2011), and the importance of community building, collegiality, and collaboration (Block, 2009; Normore & Loughry, 2006).

Although there is an ever growing reservoir of research on teacher retention in traditional schools, Popp et al. (2011) identifies a hole exists in the educational research regarding professional fulfillment and teacher retention in high-need schools, especially SAAPs. This was made clear as an exhaustive search of the research literature was done. The research was hampered by the difficulty determining the correct keywords needed to identify the research studies focused on SAAPs. Alternative education, Area Learning Centers (ALC), State Approved Alternative Programs (SAAPs) at-risk, and high-needs, were a few of the terms that did not produce the desired results.

The difficulty in locating research specifically related to SAAPs may have also been caused by other challenges; such as the ability to separate out the data for alternative schools from other public schools. Essentially, public school data is aggregated as a whole, thus mainstream school data is combined with SAAP data. Additionally, the correct keywords were apparent, it became evident that the literature surrounding SAAPs or alternative schools is limited. Few to no journal articles or studies emerged for high school alternative programs. Given the lack of research identified in this review provided motivation to begin collecting information and actually providing the rich narratives to fill the gap on professional fulfilment and teacher retention in alternative school settings. While there was sparse research on teacher retention for SAAPs it is still important to

review what is currently known about the costs of low teacher retention in general. This is addressed in the next section.

Costs of Teacher Attrition and Lack of Retention

As a SAAP principal I am well aware that hiring new teachers is less expensive than experienced teachers. However, the review of the research literature does reveal there are many costs that come with teachers leaving a school. For example there is time and effort to recruit new educators, associated hiring costs, figuring out incentives to hire the best qualified candidates, developing and funding induction programs, and professional development. Unquestionably, Ingersoll (1999) notes that the largest piece of any school budget is the cost of quality educators. Thus, when a teacher leaves a school, the process begins again to interview and find a new teacher, taking up the time of administration and veteran teachers that could be devoted elsewhere. Then the Human Resource department must conduct background checks, prepare contracts, and explain their benefits.

The hiring of new teachers can also result in lost class time when new teachers attend induction workshops and an experienced teacher is assigned mentorship duties. Carroll, Reichart and Guarino (2000) describe the potential impact on veteran teachers when there are new hires. These authors highlight that veteran teachers are spread thin as they must continually mentor new colleagues in addition to their already full class load. The strain that new hires can place on professional development is explored by Kain and Singleton (1996).

These authors describe how new hires must attend professional development

courses to learn the knowledge necessary to serve the students in their classroom and become a competent member of the staff. If these new hires leave in six years or less, Kain and Singleton (1996) point out that the schools never get the long-term payoff from their investment in novice teachers (Kain & Singleton, 1996). Instead when a teacher leaves schools must constantly put dollars into recruiting and supporting a new set of teachers. In addition to now getting a return on the professional development invested in new hires, new hires must be integrated into the existing school community. With low retention rates it means that the school community must again adjust and assimilate the new members. It is an exhaustive process that has been occurring over and over again in this profession.

This cost to continually train new teachers can be especially burdensome to schools serving at-risk students as additional professional development in areas of instruction, mental health, student stress, and behavior interventions is needed. Having effective classroom management, strong curriculum practices, presence, core knowledge, and caring are some of the traits needed to be a quality teacher. If schools are forced to continually hire new teachers students may have less access to experienced teachers who have learned the ropes. Regrettably, Popp et al. (2011) state that in disadvantaged alternative programs where high quality teachers are needed the most, students are often left with teachers who do not meet the standards of effective teaching. High quality teachers are essential for students who have also experienced ACEs.

To corroborate this, Sporleder and Forbes (2016) note, students who had experienced at least three ACEs were three times more likely to encounter academic

failures. These students were also five times more likely to have attendance issues and six times as likely to display behavioral problems. Sporleder and Forbes (2016) related some these issues to the fact that,

> Children who are exposed to multiple ACE's are overloaded with stress hormones, which leaves them in a constant state of survival. This makes the absorption of new academic material much more challenging and puts these students in a different place to handle rules and authority figures. (p. 14)

As a researcher and a long time veteran working at a SAAP, the amount of cost for additional training and education needed when teaching at-risk students cannot be overlooked.

In addition, researchers have provided evidence that additional academic and social services are essential for at-risk students increasing costs to SAAPs. Ayers and Ayers (2014) state,

> We need to understand the real crisis in communities, the real trauma that young people suffer on an ongoing basis. And we need to understand the resilience, creativity, and critical thinking that carry our students through these challenges and bring them to our doors. (p. 6)

To elaborate further, these at-risk students that are brought to our doors, bring costs of additional professional development, and the need for SAAPS to employ or partner with agencies able to provide resources to meet their challenges compounding the already costly teacher turnover. Finally, is the low socioeconomic status of these students, and

their communities, resulting in even less resources not more (Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Tissington & Grow, 2007).

All of these costs to the profession are disturbing in addition to what Duncan (2009) notes is the loss of teachers who have the potential ability to contribute considerably higher quality education to the students they serve. In fact, it would be difficult to discern all the factors that play a role in why teachers choose to be an educator and why they choose one school over another. The contribution of this dissertation will be to add narratives on choice, professional fulfilment, preparation, mentoring, and teaching assignment of teachers with ten or more years experience working at SAAPs.

This addition of these narratives to the literature is important because as Ayers, and Ayers, (2014) write, "we know that this is the most delightful, meaningful, and important profession" (p. 12). Whether or not teachers are altruistically motivated or not, school districts must compete against other occupations for graduates. The best possible outcome for SAAPs is when teachers are attracted to schools with at-risk students in alternative settings and choose to remain there. Walters (2017) explains once a choice is made, "teachers in alternative education settings, by philosophy or necessity, frequently structure their relationships with young people to be inclusive, supportive and responsive rather than exclusive, disciplinary and authoritarian" (p. 27). When this structure is in place the SAAP community is stronger and a higher professional satisfaction occurs and a lower teacher turnover rate is achieved.

Additionally, according to Walters (2017) professionals seeking to impact the whole child may gravitate to SAAPs where "in alternative settings, priority is often given

to the social-emotional development of young people over (but not at the expense of) their academic development, recognizing how much of an impact the former can have on the latter" (p. 36). The review of the research literature also provided support for the idea that induction and mentor programs can improve teacher retention and key insights from this research is described in the next section.

Induction and Mentor programs

Once teachers have been attracted to SAAPs, resources, administrative support, and input into decision making may play a role in attrition. Darling-Hammond (2010) states that an often overlooked component is induction or preparation provided which can be enhanced with strong mentoring programs. She suggests that appropriate induction and strong mentoring programs can provide a welcoming environment, support and inclusion of new teachers who often feel overwhelmed and lonely, just trying to stay ahead of their students each day. In addition to new teachers, Normore and Loughry (2006) stress that all educators benefit professionally when they are given time to collaborate, receive feedback, and feel supported.

Not nearly as prevalent in teacher attrition rates in the literature are the numerous references to the category of teacher stress and how induction and mentoring programs decrease stress. Fisher (2011) writes, "the most popular methods of combating stress are positive peer collaboration, better mentoring for new teachers, and more effective professional development, however the specificity of those three methods has yet to be determined" (p. 29). The premise is that mentor programs decrease stress and better prepare individuals to remain in the profession.

In point of fact Dillon (2009) writes that, "research has shown induction programs can cut turnover in half and decrease the time it takes beginning teachers to become proficient in their craft" (p. 28). This then plays a role by reducing the cost of hiring new teachers. Additionally, The National Education Association (NEA) (Long, 2015, May) corroborates this statistic and reports that new teachers given the opportunity to engage in an induction and then a mentoring program were two times more likely to remain teaching. Thus, reducing teacher attrition and improving the overall quality of education delivered.

In addition to Long (2015, May) Ingersoll and Smith (2004) found that induction programs that included multiple components reached more teachers and decreased the probability of turnover. The challenge is how the quality of induction programs varies from district to district. Indeed, there is no guarantee that a district will have an induction program and even more problematic is the lack of assurance that said induction program will fit the unique needs of teachers working at a SAAP. Dillon (2009) describes how at a minimum basic induction programs should include appropriate professional development training, time with colleagues, mentorship from experienced peers, and summative assessments.

While reviewing the research literature it became apparent that there is very little information focused only on induction programs. Nearly every journal article or study reviewed for this chapter spoke about the combination of induction and mentoring as a wrap around approach. Even with the lack of specific research articles related to induction programs a key finding is that induction and mentoring provide benefits to new

teachers as well as veteran teachers. For example, Long (2015, May 13) states the list of

benefits is broad, encompassing classroom management, increased use of time, grading

practices, and a rebirth of dedication for instruction. Collaborative research has found

when a mentor program is constructed well, retention rates increase as new teachers

report improved attitudes, skills, and sense of efficacy with a lateral benefit of positively

impacting veteran teachers. Dillon (2009) corroborates this with one positive impact of

mentoring on veteran teachers describing how it can rejuvenate and rekindle senior staff

as they share and "teach" their younger colleagues.

An assumption of Hulin-Austin (1990) is that by studying all the broad categories

of mentoring programs that have been thoroughly researched, school districts will begin

to make their new teacher mentor/implementation programs include resources for the

teachers working with at-risk youth. The next section will summarize key ideas from the

review of the research literature regarding the impact of teaching assignment on teacher

retention.

Impact of Teaching Assignment on Teacher Retention

During this study, the researcher sought to discover if another piece that could

impact educator's professional fulfillment would be consistent teaching assignments

placing teachers in their licensed discipline area. In my experience as both a teacher and

administrator teachers choose to pursue a license in a specific discipline area and expect

their course load to reflect this. However, in my career and in conversations with peers it

is not uncommon for new or inexperienced teachers working in small or rural SAAPS to

be required to teach courses that they are not licensed in. For this to happen, the school will apply for a waiver to cover the discrepancy in licensing.

Ingersoll (1999) has explored the impact of prepping for a course that you have no educational foundation and the toll it can take both mentally and physically making teachers want to flee from their SAAP or the profession entirely. It is not a surprise that forcing teachers to teach a class without proper training or preparation can lead to an unsatisfying teaching experience and decreased feelings of value. In fact Ingersoll (1999) writes it is "one of the least recognized of these causes [low teacher retention] is the phenomenon known as out-of-field-teaching--teachers assigned to teach subjects for which they have little training or education" (p. 26). To clarify, this occurs when teachers are required to teach outside of the discipline area in which they were trained. Out-of-field teaching is common and Ingersoll (1999) notes that "in any given year, out-of-field teaching takes place in well over half of all secondary schools in the U.S." (p. 28). Combine out-of-field teaching with teacher tenure and seniority driving the system results in beginning teachers being more apt to be misassigned then veteran teachers. Through her extensive professional career the researcher has witnessed this practice take place.

For example, I have witnessed a first year teacher who is licensed in physical education and health education be asked to fill in part-time and teach two art classes. This took place because the principal was unable to fill the art position. Ingersoll's (1999) research corroborates my professional experience noting how this practice is occurring and identifies shortages of teachers, immovable teacher unions, and deficient training of

educators as causation. Hence, placing a probationary teacher in an out-of-teaching

situation can cause undue stress teaching a curriculum they have never been trained in. In

addition to out-of-teaching assignments, the research literature reviewed for this chapter

supports the importance of teachers feeling that they are part of a supportive community

and that it has the potential to improve teacher retention.

Community Building, Collaboration and Collegiality

Moreover, through this review of the research literature explored the importance

of community, belonging and the culture existing in SAAPs. For example, Gruenert and

Whitaker (2015) write that "We tend to gravitate toward groups--that is, cultures --that

share our beliefs, preferences, or goals. Doing so enhances our sense of security and

self-esteem"(p. 14). I reflected on this idea of Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) through my

lens as a veteran educator teaching in a specific school. The school where I have worked

since 1991 consciously builds community, schedules to allow collaboration, and

encourages collegiality. The culture of our school has for myself and my peers solidified

our sense of security and self-esteem. Is this perhaps the reason I am a long timer at my

school?

In addition to Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) Block (2009) writes about the

importance of an organization's culture/community. He writes, "the social fabric of

community is formed from an expanding shared sense of belonging" (p. 9). As a member

of a staff that has grown old together, remaining a core team for fourteen years, our

SAAP typifies Block's (2009) definition of the social fabric of community. With the

culmination of retirements, the team embraces new, young staff, and begins the

community building process once again. Being the only SAAP in a large school district working with an at-risk population provided an atmosphere where working as a team became an opportunity to flourish. Gruenert and Whitaker, (2015) reiterate this when they write,

> members of a culture will help to shape one another, and the culture in turn will evolve into a unique group of individuals who share certain characteristics and take some pride in being set apart from those outside the group. (p. 7)

The challenge then in building community is to treasure and preserve the joys and find ways to manage the frustrations (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Recommendations by Fisher (2011) sum up the way to structure community is to allow novice teachers to have opportunities to collaborate with their peers, reminding them to be mindful not to isolate, and help them to receive mentoring from experienced teachers in their content area.

Conclusions and Transitions to Chapter Three

To recapitulate, although there is an ever growing reservoir of research and literature on teacher retention and professional satisfaction in traditional schools, Popp et al. (2011) identifies a hole exists in the educational research regarding professional fulfillment and teacher retention in high-need schools, especially SAAPs. This was made clear after an exhaustive search of the research literature was completed. Consequently, it became evident while researching the literature that facets of professional fulfillment of teachers remaining in a SAAP must be discovered in the rich narratives through the interview process of this qualitative research.

In Chapter Three you will find a comprehensive explanation of the qualitative methodology used in conjunction with a detailed rationale of this methodology, the definitive research design, and how this chosen methodology guided the data collection tools and analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology and Design

Introduction to Chapter Three

This chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the research methodology used in conjunction with a detailed rationale of this qualitative methodology, the definitive research design, and how this chosen methodology guided the data collection tools and analysis. The primary research question in this study was: *How do administrators and teachers with ten years or more experience at the same State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP) explain their decision to stay with that program and their level of professional fulfilment.* State Approved Alternative Programs (SAAP) are publically funded for students at-risk of not meeting their graduation date and encompass Area Learning Centers (ALC), Contract Alternatives, and Alternative Learning Programs (ALP).

My secondary questions were:

- *How do the participants describe the path that led them to teach at a SAAP and why they stay?*

- *How do the participants describe their preparation during their pre-service program to work with the at-risk population at a SAAP*

- *How do the participants describe the nature of their on-board training or mentorship at a SAAP*

- *How do the participants describe their level of professional fulfilment at a SAAP?*

In the state where the research took place the first SAAPs began in 1988 and in the Academic Year 2018/2019 represent about 17 percent of public school students. This statistic incompases students that are in core school day programs and extended time students. According to the department of education these are " . . . learning-year programs and are funded with General Education Revenue. Students [enrolled in these programs] are eligible to generate up to 1.2 Average Daily Membership (ADM)[1] for their district." This is higher than students enrolled in traditional schools who generate up to 1.0 ADM. As students enrolled in a SAAP are at-risk of not meeting their graduation date, they are eligible to make up lost credits, hence generating a higher ADM (see Note 1). ADM is reported to the department of education and funding is reimbursed accordingly.

Specifically, "in 2015-2016, there were 560 sites in 131 approved districts, including 242 Area Learning Centers, 53 Alternative Learning Programs, 18 Contracted Alternatives Programs and 247 Targeted services programs" (State Approved Alternative Programs Resource Guide, p. 2). At the time of the research the researcher was an Executive Committee member of a professional state board and had access to all the SAAPs and their staff through board participation and the state's Alternative and Extended Learning Specialist.

Rationale for the Use of a Qualitative Approach

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[1] Average Daily Membership (ADM) is the measurement used to calculate revenue for individual schools dependent on each student's enrollment.

Using a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to collect in-depth narratives that brought to light the reasons teachers and administrators remain working with at-risk students in a SAAP. Using a qualitative approach also supported the researcher's interest in exploring how the participants make meaning of their experience. Actions, perceptions, and beliefs are at the heart of this research bringing rich description and understanding to the lived experience at the SAAP from the person living it (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). While collecting these rich narratives, the researcher also explored how these educators came to work at a SAAP, if they had any prior training before working with at-risk students, and were they given guidance and mentorship once working at a SAAP.

Furthermore, a qualitative research method afforded the liberty to provide various interpretations and perspectives on the participants work in a natural setting. Maxwell (2013) notes that a qualitative approach is appropriate when there is not an opportunity to control factors and the setting in which the research takes place is organic, which is the case when working at a SAAP. Working with at-risk students enrolled in a SAAP brings its own unique challenges, professional fulfillment as well as being complex. For this research the term at-risk was based on the work of Popp, Grant, and Stronge's (2011). These authors explained that students are at-risk if they are not successfully meeting their graduation date because of environmental factors that are outside of their control. These environmental factors may be but are not limited to: mobility, poverty, mental health, and chemical use (Popp et al., 2011).

Furthermore, qualitative research also provided an enlightenment opportunity for teachers and administrators to gain insights regarding their careers. This enlightenment occurred as individuals shared and reflected on their journey. Maxwell (2013) also states a qualitative approach is appropriate when one of the goals is to apprise how these individuals, in this case the participants working at SAAPs, made sense of their lived experience and what their understandings were, thus generating new knowledge. Taking the time to unearth the thoughts, supports, and connections present that perhaps were unbenost to the participants brought about valuable information that might never have been shared.

Additionally, according to Creswell (2014), qualitative research design can have a transformative element. This transformative component may occur once the data reveals the components present that contribute to the longevity and professional fulfillment when working at a SAAP. Hence, a long term goal of this research was to use the narratives collected to potentially identify areas for transformation, uncover solutions for the participants and better understand why some educators make the decision to continue working at a SAAP. Identifying areas for transformation has the potential to provide new information that could reduce attrition and increase professional fulfilment.

Qualitative research also allowed the researcher to bring their experience in the context to bear on the analyses. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) the researcher's positionality provided a lens of expertise with the given context that can be applied to the analysis. A positive of this positionality is that it allowed for the interpretation and synthesizing of the data in new and unique ways. For example, the

researcher's deep professional experience in a SAAP setting gave the opportunity to see things in the narratives that others might have missed. A potential negative of this positionality is that the researcher may have only seen what they wanted to see. This research design listens to the advice of McMillan and Schumacher (2010) in making explicit the researcher's positionality.

To put it succinctly, this qualitative research design provided the opportunity for the researcher to use two data collection tools, a qualitative survey and a qualitative interview. Both the survey and the interview are an adaptation of an online survey developed by Petty, Fitchet, and Connor (2012). During the review of the literature surrounding teacher retention at high-need schools, the researcher came across a study published in 2012 titled *Attracting and Keeping Teachers in High-Need Schools* in the American Secondary Education Journal. This study by Petty et al. (2012) contained similar thought patterns and survey techniques as the researcher but held a different premise than the researcher. Petty et al. (2012) utilized an online survey that focused on the perceptions of teachers who currently teach in high-need schools. The participants offered suggestions on how to attract, retain, and support teachers in these schools. Although these original researchers focused on monetary rewards, their survey questions follow the same format and resonated with the current researcher.

The original survey was sent to 537 teachers and had a 35% response rate with 189 educators completing the survey. The researcher felt an immediate affinity with these original sixteen interview questions (see Appendix F) used by Petty, et al. (2012) and then revised these sixteen questions and divided them into survey questions and interview

questions (see Appendix D and E) to align with the current research questions. This revision process occured after deliberating the time necessary to interview, transcribe, and code seven interviews with sixteen questions. The researcher determined that pertinent information could be obtained and made more manageable by breaking the original questions used by Petty, et al. (2012) into ten survey questions and eight interview questions.

Completion of the research findings will be presented and shared at the statewide conference of SAAPs attended by more than four hundred teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, clerical staff, and legislators. Moreover, the researcher will ask the legislative committee of an alternative organization to consider adding the identified areas of transformation to their legislative platform. This platform will be used when working towards bipartisan support for policy change. Implications for stakeholders and suggestions for reform are addressed and detailed in Chapter Five.

Electronic Qualitative Survey: Development and Implementation

A goal then of this research, was to build upon the work of Petty et al. (2012) and to look for answers beyond financial reimbursement. The survey questions used by Petty et al. (2012) provided the foundation for this new research but were not replicated nor used in its entirety. In order to address the primary and secondary questions of this research, the Petty et al. (2012) survey questions were adapted and broadened.

The research design required the completion of an electronic online survey prior to a forty-five minute interview. The online survey contained six closed response questions and four open ended items for a total of ten questions. Twelve people

completed the survey. From the twelve individuals that took the survey, four administrators and three teachers were interviewed.

The survey was designed to take participants no more than thirty minutes. The questions created for this research gathered specific numerical data and allowed participants the opportunity to share information freely on open ended prompts. The survey was emailed out in a Google Form format to the individuals that agreed to participate in this research study and that fit the required criteria. The email addresses were already known to the researcher. If any assistance had been necessary regarding email addresses, the researcher had multiple connections to find the information needed.

To begin, a pilot test was used to finalize the survey to determine any problematic questions. The piloted survey was given to two teachers working at an SAAP who would not be involved in the remainder of the research. In addition to the survey questions, the individuals piloting the survey were asked for feedback about the process and the actual questions. When the feedback regarding the survey questions and process was satisfactory, the researcher moved forward. Thus, surveys were used to gather basic demographic and professional background experience. Having this information allowed the researcher to narrow the focus of the forty-five-minute interview.

Recruited individuals completed the adapted electronic online survey. Once the participants completed the survey an appointment was set up by the researcher to interview these same participants. Assuredly, the answers shared in the survey guided the direction of the interview questions. The researcher believed the combination of a well crafted survey and a concise interview, resulted in the best course of completion.

Electronic Qualitative Survey: Proposed Data Analysis

Surveys were sent out as a Google Form allowing the computer to compile the results. The researcher reviewed the information for connections to the research and additions to already held assumptions. As Fink (2017) had discovered, "The data the surveys will provide are descriptions of feelings and perceptions, and personal background or demographic characteristics such as longevity, employment, and preparation" (p. 5). To recapitulate, once the survey results were compiled and reviewed, interviews were conducted at the convenience of the interviewee. The survey data was then added to the interview data to produce a complete picture of the reasoning behind remaining at a SAAP and their magnitude of professional fulfilment.

Qualitative Interview

According to Brinkmann and Kvale, (2015) the qualitative interview pursues knowledge from the interviewee in their own language with the goal of discerning the pieces of their day-to-day lives from their own viewpoint. Additionally, Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe the difference between an interview and ordinary conversations. These authors note that while ordinary conservations take place in social settings and occur to preserve a relationship, interviews are utilized to cultivate a relationship and discern the answers to the proposed research questions.

The value of including qualitative interviews was supported by the review of the research for this study. For example, in the area of teacher attribution Gonzalez, Brown, and Slate (2008) describe the significance of teachers' voices and appropriately gathered data through the interview process as they sought understanding teacher attrition. They

studied the reasons teachers give when leaving the profession after only one year. These researchers believed in and knew the importance of giving the teachers a voice as does this researcher. A goal of this study was to discover from teachers working in a SAAPs the factors they perceive hinder teachers from remaining at a SAAP. Furthermore, Burke et al., (2013) used a qualitative interview component as they searched for the foundation underlying teachers' decisions to remain or depart from the profession. Interviews conducted by Burke et al. (2013) asked teachers to respond with metaphors, supports, challenges, and a narration of their practice. These researchers also reduced their findings into themes and established open coding analysis.

A semi-structured qualitative interview with open ended questions was created for this research. Building upon the work of Petty et al. (2012). The original questions had been modified to obtain the information desired for this research. Revised interview questions were piloted with two teachers before they were fine-tuned.

Interviews were conducted at the convenience of the interviewee following the completion of their survey. Each interview was recorded on an application downloaded to an iPhone. Interviewees were provided with a copy of the questions before the interview giving participants time to reflect on their lived experiences. A forty-five-minute time limit was placed on the interviews, to encourage participation and to ascertain the desired information yet not be inundated by too much data. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and a professional transcriptionist.

As this researcher had limited experience interviewing, transcribing interviews, and coding for themes a decision was made to follow the advice of Brinkmann and Kvale

(2015), who believe it is too late to decide how to analyze your transcripts after your

interviews are already conducted. Heeding this advice the researcher used a deductive

approach in the initial analyses of the interview transcripts using the following

predetermined themes:

- factors that influenced their career choice

- induction and mentor programs

- choice in assignment

- educational philosophy

- sense of community

- professional satisfaction

The data analysis began after each interview was transcribed by the researcher

and the professional transcriptionist. The interviews were read through thoroughly and

coded using the pre-determine keywords: mentor, community, relationships, at-risk,

choice, philosophy, passion, mental health, stress, and satisfaction. Conducting a cross

sectional case study coding for predetermined keywords gave the researcher an

opportunity to look for duplication and confirmation of data. The choice of this coding

technique chosen by the researcher is supported best with these words, "Coding involves

attaching one or more keywords to a text segment in order to permit later identification of

a statement" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 227). The codes were then placed into

categories or themes: freedom, flexibility, induction training, mentorship, choice in

employment, sense of community, professional satisfaction, university preparation,

mental health, stress, and educational philosophy. These themes were also scoured until duplication of themes emerged.

By extension, during analysis the researcher explored the categories that emerged for conflicting or divergent data. This divergent data is acknowledged to inform future researchers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Once each interview was analyzed it was treated as a separate case. Once all individual interviews (cases) were analyzed a cross case analysis was completed.

In addition, researchers do more than just study individuals, they campaign for change (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher has been immersed in the profession since 1991 hence, the ability to interpret the information gathered was done with a greater level of expertise than any researcher outside the profession (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Through the interview analysis the researcher illuminated the common traits teachers and administrators possess that remain in a SAAP and what outside elements are present, bringing to light new practices and possible policy changes.

Participants

The researcher, having spent their career working in a SAAP, was quite knowledgeable regarding alternative education, school sites, and staff tenure. Thus, the researcher began recruiting participants by reaching out to male and female educators working at a SAAP. The research was then explained and the individuals were asked if they would be interested in participating. While several of the core group did not want to participate in the research, they did recommend new, perhaps more appropriate

individuals who agreed to be interviewed. So the recruitment did rely on a modified

snowball approach as defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

The initial goal of the research was to have representation of male and female

participants each having worked in a SAAP for ten or more years, in different schools.

The total number of participants was seven. The participant sample was made up of three

teachers and four administrators. One male teacher and two female teachers, and two

male administrators and two female administrators were recruited to participate.

Educators who teach at a SAAP have the same licensure qualifications and

requirements as educators in a traditional school setting. Administrators of a SAAP may

hold an Administrative License from the state where the research took place or maybe a

Teacher On Special Assignment, or given the title of Director, and do not possess an

administrative license. Participants were recruited from a geographically diverse area in

hopes of enhancing the validity and authenticity of the study. The number of available

participants was subject to the number of individuals who meet the criteria.

The recruitment plan began in 2018 and was based on the number of professional

contacts the researcher had built during a 27-year career working at a SAAP as well as

her continued participation as an elected member of a professional board. Board

membership granted interaction with hundreds of teachers and administrators in

conjunction with numerous alternative program site visits.

Each year a statewide conference is held where colleagues are approached and

asked for their attendance, participation, and practitioner presentations. This prolonged

career, face-to-face approach, and participation at the state level has allowed the

researcher uncomplicated access to schools and interviewees. It was anticipated that during the recruitment period, individual contacts would also provide additional names and contact information for potential participants outside of the researcher's direct professional network. Once seven individuals agreed to participate, additional teachers and administrators were asked if they were willing to fill in if the loss of a contributing member occured. Hoping to prevent any setbacks, an alternate list of contributors was compiled.

Colleagues who agreed to be part of this research answered both the adapted online survey questions and were recorded as they engaged in a forty-five minute interview with the researcher.

Limitations of the Research Design

In conducting this research it had become clear that the researchers' experience had been so singular that a need arose to be sure this was not a determinant. After participation on the state board and maintaining membership lists, the data had proven that teachers teaching in SAAPs are transient. Beyond this, the researcher held several assumptions: teachers are not attracted to SAAPs, teachers have not been exposed to alternative schools or at-risk learners, and having mentor programs and induction programs will increase teachers professional fulfillment.

With this singular experience special attention was given to limit sampling bias, "which can occur when the researcher consciously or unconsciously selects subjects that result in inaccurate findings" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 143).

Indeed, the interviews were crafted to avoid biased words and questions soliciting a certain response or answer. Related to this was the need to make sure that body language or facial expressions were not inferring or hinting at an answer as interviews were conducted. The stage was set for the interviews and the educators interviewed understood that an honest response, not one the researcher was searching for, was desired (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). That being stated, it must be noted that all interviewees have known the researcher for many years and interacted with them on a personal and professional level.

Conclusion and Transition to Chapter Four

The primary research question in this study was: *How do administrators and teachers with ten years or more experience at the same State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP) explain their decision to stay with that program and their level of professional fulfilment.* The methodology was comprised of a qualitative case study utilizing surveys and interviewing as the data collection tools. After searching through the literature, the researcher created a list of ten survey questions and eight interview questions (see Appendix D and E) and then piloted the survey questions with two teachers from the target group before using them with the individual case study participants. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to collect extensive and elaborate narratives that brought to light the reasons teachers remain working with at-risk students in an alternative setting. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher and a professional transcriptionist. After the completed transcription, they were then coded for themes from each case study. The themes coded for included: freedom, flexibility,

induction training, mentorship, choice in employment, sense of community, professional

satisfaction, university preparation, mental health, stress, and educational philosophy. The

researcher's positionality provided a lens where expertise with the given context allowed

interpretation of survey and interview question responses, and the ability to synthesize

the data that was obtained (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis

Introduction to Chapter Four

The researcher used a qualitative approach allowing the collection of in depth narratives bringing to light the reasons teachers and administrators remain working in a State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP). The qualitative study explored *How administrators and teachers with ten or more years of experience at the same State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP) explain their decision to stay with that program and their level of professional fulfillment.* Additionally this research was designed to deepen the understanding of the following secondary questions:

- *How do the participants describe the path that led them to teach at a SAAP and why they stay?*
- *How do the participants describe their preparation during their pre-service program to work with the at-risk population at a SAAP?*
- *How do the participants describe the nature of their on-board training or mentorship at a SAAP?*
- *How do the participants describe their level of professional fulfilment at a SAAP?*

When the data analysis began in 2021the lens the researcher brought to this analysis was that of an educator dedicating 30-years working in a State Approved Alternative Program first as a teacher and then as an administrator. While immersed in

each interview, and during the analysis was the confirmation that the interviewees were individuals who had a passion for the students, staff, and programming. Analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in identification of similar themes that drove them to return and continuously improve every day. Each interview conducted was tremendously gratifying and fulfilling providing rich narratives of the lived experience of the participants while working in the SAAP environment.

Bringing my lens of 30-years working in a SAAP aligned with the principles of qualitative research. For example, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described how the researcher's positionality provided a lens of expertise with the given context that can be applied to the analysis. The authors argue that a positive of this positionality is that it can allow for the interpretation and synthesize of the data in new and unique ways. Based on the rationale of McMillian and Schumacher (2010) I gave myself permission to bring my professional experience as a lens to inform my data analyses.

Overview of the Data Analysis

In brief, this qualitative research design provided the opportunity for the researcher to use two data collection tools, a qualitative survey and a qualitative interview. The research design required the completion of an electronic online survey prior to the interview. The survey results were compiled and reviewed. Upon review, every individual who completed the survey agreed to participate in a qualitative interview to provide further details about their experiences working in a SAAP.

Each interview was scheduled at a time that was convenient for the interviewee and then conducted at a location they selected. Once all of the interviews were conducted

they were transcribed by both myself and a professional transcriptionist. The professional

transcriptionist operated under a confidentiality agreement. The desire to keep all

participants anonymous was imperative. The survey data was added to the transcribed

interview data to produce a complete picture of the participant's reasoning behind

remaining at a SAAP and their magnitude of professional fulfilment. These pieces were

analyzed to discover similar themes. Those themes were:

- factors that influenced their career choice of becoming an educator

- induction and mentor programs

- choice in assignment

- educational philosophy

- sense of community

- professional satisfaction

When combing through the narratives to analyze the data within, interviews were

checked for information on induction and mentor programs provided. Was there any

pre-service preparation or organized individual support as they began. The researcher was

also interested if participants chose to seek out a position in alternative education, why

they chose to stay, and did their educational philosophy play a role in their decisions?

Once their path led them to the SAAP what elements were present in the community that

provided a sense of professional fulfillment and satisfaction. As a researcher I was

especially interested in hearing why these participants choose to remain working at their

SAAP for ten or more years.

Analyses of Administrative Interviews

Four interviews were conducted with participants in an administrative role at the time of the interview. In the state where this research was conducted the SAAP is a small community. While the sample size for this research was small the researcher still strove to have a representative group interviewed; two male and two female administrators were chosen. Two of the administrators had between ten and fifteen years of experience and two had more than fifteen years of experience. The administrators' SAAP were located across the state and the size and the format of their SAAP varied.

During the analysis, a surprising discovery was the unique path each administrator had as they made their way to the leadership of their alternative schools. While this discovery during the analysis was enjoyable to learn, the researcher was unable to disclose any details of their unique paths for fear that this information would compromise the anonymity of the individuals. As stated earlier the confidentiality of participants was paramount to the researcher.

Additionally in the analysis, a telling theme emerged that I had anticipated. All of the administrators' narratives heavily involved the community found in their schools; relationships of staff members, staff members with students, as well as students relationships. They used terms such as family, team, and personal relationships to convey how connected they were and how the community as a whole related to one another. While discussing their role as administrators, they each touched on their independence as leaders.

Bringing my administrator lens to the analysis there are three ways I conceptualized their independence. One component is linked to the level of freedom as a

leader described during the interview. For example, the participants noted having the freedom to operate outside of the traditional K-12 public school system. A second component of the independence described during the interviews is the freedom as a leader to make unique decisions. The third component of the idea of being independent as leaders was the freedom to level the hierarchy between teaching staff and administration. These three components of having independence as a leader seemed to bring professional satisfaction and contribute to retention of the interviewees. Overall while analyzing the interviews it became clear that the administrators loved what they did and found their days rewarding.

Administrator One

Administrator one was the first interview conducted. It occurred before the school year began at a site and time convenient to the administrator. It was the longest administrator interview conducted. As a researcher I was nervous and inexperienced. Administrator one took all of this in stride and happily provided complete and detailed answers. They patiently devoted the time needed to provide quality data. As a researcher, this interview gave me the confidence and experience necessary to successfully conduct the rest of the interviews. Administrator one has worked in a SAAP for more than 10 years.

Factors that influenced their career choice of becoming an educator. Like two of the other administrators interviewed, Administrator one always knew they wanted to be a teacher; as many in their extended family were involved in education. When looking at the data, there were two items that really stood out as a researcher,

Administrator one's perseverance and their unique path to becoming an administrator at a SAAP.

Throughout the narrative Administrator one's perseverance was evident. During the first question a piece of their reflection began with, "Um, when someone said I couldn't do it, I was like I'll show you!" With their perseverance and the early influences of their extended family, Administrator one described the impact of the new Professional Learning Community (PLC) they were a part of as affecting their future career choices. After initially considering a different profession, Administrator one completed their undergraduate education degree and entered the teaching profession in a graduate PLC program by switching places with a veteran teacher. This teaching position was 15 months long and in a small rural environment. This PLC program provided mentorship and the opportunity to be part of a small school community.

Next, Administrator one moved to a new state and taught Advanced Placement (AP) students that in Administrator one's words were not interested in learning, they were only interested in the grade. Administrator one then moved again, returning to the community near their family where they interviewed at an Area Learning Center (ALC). Again, Administrator one's perseverance was evident when they proclaimed,

I had no idea what I was getting myself into at an ALC. I didn't know what it meant, I didn't know what it looked like, but what I knew, is I wanted a place where I could teach hands-on learning to kids that cared about their learning and that's what the ALC was all about.

Administrator one's family history as educators, the rural small community school they began in, the AP students not caring about the learning, tied with Administrator one's perseverance all led Administrator one to their position at a SAAP.

Induction and mentor program. After the completion of their undergraduate degree Administrator one embraced a graduate program where they became a part of a formalized mentor program being paired with a veteran teacher and was part of a cohort. Reflecting back, Administrator one was glad of the mentor, the pre-service work, the applications learned, experience in a classroom, teaching, and the opportunity to discuss what occurred in their classroom with a veteran teacher. Furthermore, Administrator one felt that the best training that they received were restorative practice and circle keeping practices and their Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) training.

AVID's mission is designed to close the opportunity gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success. Administrator one credits their AVID training with allowing staff at their SAAP " . . . to teach at a higher [level of] rigor and scaffold for the kids so they could meet [the level of academic skill needed to succeed in a post secondary institution] instead of just expecting it and not giving them that support." The AVID programs provided Administrator one and their teachers with clear goals and a common language for all to use.

Choice in assignment. Initially, this administrator did not know the purpose of an Area Learning Center (ALC), another name for a SAAP. However, during the interview Administrator one described how understanding the nature of the ALC and its mission and vision made them want to work in that environment. What they initially saw

and discovered led them to exclaim during our interview, "but what I knew is I wanted a place where I could teach hands-on learning to kids that really cared about their learning and that's what an Area Learning Center was all about." Administrator one also noted during our interview how a component of their educational philosophy was the idea that they could teach strategies that were useful for students. As the researcher, my interpretation is that Administrator one felt the smaller and flexible environment found at SAAPs allowed them more freedom when teaching standards and also provided more teacher to student one-on-one time. During the interview Administrator one also listed this aspect of their educational philosophy as a factor in what drove them to seek a position in an ALC/SAAP.

Educational philosophy. Administrator one's philosophy regarding the value of hands-on learning continued to steer their decisions when they built ownership within their school and determined that they wanted to lead the school and seek their administrative license. Administrator one's exact words were, "I don't want just anyone coming in [to teach or lead their ALC], I know where I want the program to go, so I will go get my administrative license." Administrator one chose to work at a SAAP and chose to become an administrator and continue on in a leadership role at their school. The collaboration that was present during their pre-service and initial graduate mentorship opportunity was carried on in their current role where the administration works together as a team gathering for lunch to learn from each other.

Moreover, Administrator one's educational philosophy could be felt as they describe the various ways they related to their teaching staff. For example, Administrator

one described the importance of being an open and transparent leader while giving their

staff a voice, making sure they felt honored and valued. They went on to say that it was

imperative that staff felt as if they were on an even playing field, which in my experience

is different from the traditional K-12 system. Administrator one reaffirmed this

philosophy with, "I don't like that hierarchy."

       Sense of community. In all four administrative interviews, community or

perhaps more aptly, the relationships that are built and maintained with these

communities is a resounding theme that has carried through all the analysis of the

interviews with administrators. Additionally within the analysis, community is

intertwined throughout all the other themes. While analyzing, the researcher noted that

Administrator one used words to reflect the importance of community ten times in their

thirty minute interview.

       One example where the importance of community shone through, was in

Administrator one's reflection on their time as a teacher. Prior to moving into

administration, Administrator one softly stated, " . . . the personal relationships we had .

. . the support that we got from each other and the love of the content we got to share with

the students." Those relationships and common passions built a bond and forged a

community. This community with these relationships created support which gave the

members (staff and students) a safe place to flourish.

       In this portion of the interview Administrator one described moving to a new

SAAP location and into administration. Additionally, during this part of the interview

Administrator one continues to describe the importance of working collaboratively in

community at the new SAAP to be successful. In addition to the importance of collaborating as a community Administrator one introduces another aspect of being in community, having similar mental models [with staff and teachers at the SAAP] (Senge, 2006). Specific examples of linking to the idea of similar mental models to practice was when Administrator one described how " . . . my staff is amazing. They are all on the same page with trauma informed instruction, we are all on the same page on equity, and we are students first, in the forefront of every decision we make." Another important mental model identified by Administrator one was, "We [staff/teachers/leader] all acknowledge that family comes first."

Professional satisfaction. When the interview was coming to a close Administrator one shared a story about a time they were asked to leave their SAAP and take a position at a traditional high school. Administrator one did not take the new position and linked this decision to their level of personal satisfaction in the following quote, "I don't want to leave this place . . . I'd lose that relationship with my students and with my teachers, and I just want that." This quote supports the conclusion that for Administrator one being part of a collaborative community with similar mental models is an important component of their professional satisfaction.

Summary of this interview. To recap, Administrator one was the perfect participant for this novice researcher to begin the interview process and hone their skills. They patiently dedicated the time required to thoughtfully share their lived narrative and allowed the researcher to fumble through their first formal interview.

Four highlights of the analysis include one, Administrator one's perseverance, "I can do this." Two, their unique journey to their SAAP, three, their strong sense of community and four, their passion for the students, staff and families within their school.

Administrator Two

Administrator two was the second interview conducted. Unlike Administrator one, it was completed during the school year. During the school year time is in short supply and the researcher and Administrator two struggled to find a perfect time for the interview to be conducted. The interview eventually occurred on a day and time before a holiday break. Administrator two was as gracious and as happy to participate as Administrator one but the interview felt rushed and ended up being the shortest of the administrative interviews. Administrator two has been at a SAAP for more than 15 years.

Factors that influenced their career choice. Administrator two shared that their journey to teaching began because of their family. Administrator two had a number of family members who are/were teachers. Administrator two also had strong relationships with their family and had the opportunity to witness and learn what a career in education would provide. Unlike Administrator's one, three and four, Administrator two had a more traditional route into the teaching profession. In their words, "the whole family is a bunch of teachers and so it was just that's what you do."

This administrator carried this history and educational philosophy into their leadership role and always promotes with staff members that family comes first. Their own family, the family created as a staff, as well as students' families.

Induction and mentor programs. When they began, administrator two did not have a formal induction or mentor program but spoke fondly about individuals who informally mentored them and modeled what they believed, "establish a relationship and be clear what's expected." Administrator two also described how since they were hired by the district a formal mentor program now exists in the district and their school. Administrator two described how as part of the new formal mentor program there are instructional coaches that will be engaged with one of their new teachers. The value of having a formal mentoring program is described in their own words when they noted, "I think that [because of the formal mentoring program for new hires] we have building support, district support and all of it is geared towards . . . academic and social and emotional support for them [new hires] and that's pretty good."

Educational philosophy. In addition to family first dominating Administrator two's educational philosophy, was their desire to flatten the hierarchy between their role as the leader and the teaching staff. They wanted to be sure that they did not come across as a traditional principal. Administrator two was insistent that their school culture was built so that communication flows effortlessly back and forth. According to Administrator two, their staff needed to feel that there was a safe opportunity to voice their input. Their exact words were, "especially if it's in the best interest of the kids." This desire to flatten the hierarchy was also seen in Administrator one's narrative.

Choice in assignment. Administrator two did not discuss in depth the specifics of their journey to their individual SAAP and as a novice researcher, the skills to prompt more details was still being developed. What Administrator two shared was that they did

not necessarily plan to be an administrator but the need arose and in a similar fashion to Administrator one said, "I didn't want someone to come in and ruin what we have."

Sense of community. Relationships or community were once again intertwined throughout the interview and visible in the data analysis of Administrator two's interview transcript. Administrator two explained that the healthy relationships that are built between staff and students extends so far that students begin to call staff members Mom, Dad or Grandpa; "That you become an extension of the family system." Administrator two then went on to excitedly explain that their teachers continue to stay [at the SAAP] "because of the relationships [be] cause it makes it far more personal."

Administrator two described how they expanded upon this community/family dynamic by promoting with staff to make their students feel comfortable with who they are. For Administrator two it was important that the staff " . . . become kind of an extension of the family system, that's for sure."

Professional satisfaction. When Administrator two was asked why they stay, what brings them satisfaction in their professional life at their SAAP, Administrator two spoke about having far greater flexibility than any other building in the district to individualize instruction to meet the needs of the kids and families. Moreover, Administrator two corroborated this sentiment of independence by stating that there was the freedom to do what was right for kids and not just follow a policy.

During their rumination, Administrator two mused, "Why do I stay, I stay because I see good things happening here. I see you can actually help people and it's pretty gratifying . . . we really look at the big picture and the whole kid."

Summary of this interview. A synopsis of Administrator two's interview would contain the words family, freedom, and the reduction of the hierarchical model.

Administrator Three

Administrator three's interview also took place during the school year at the end of a long student day. As with the previous interviews, Administrator three did not let the length of the day deter them and enthusiastically answered each of the interview questions. As a researcher, I had begun to hone my skills of prompting and seeking elaboration. This then was the second longest administrative interview. Administrator three has been at a SAAP for more than 15 years.

Factors that influenced their career choice. A unique piece to Administrator three was when they shared that they did not enter college immediately knowing that they wanted to be an educator as administrator one and two did. As Administrator three worked their way through college societal factors during the decade and projected career options as well as environmental factors converged with their passions to eventually lead them to an education degree.

Induction and mentor program. During Administrator three's first years in a SAAP they were not formally involved in an induction or mentor program. Informally, in their words, "staff and teachers . . . helped me learn the ropes." However, even though Administrator three was not involved in an induction or mentor program when they started teaching they describe a connection between their undergraduate teacher preparation program, the early years of their career and it coming full circle to the doorstep of their SAAP.

For example, Administrator three began their career working with high needs students. In reflecting on their early career Administrator three describes how their undergraduate degree and the beginning of their teaching career opened their eyes and prepared them to know how to work with high need K-12 learners. In the early years, "going out to places where third graders are emergent readers, which isn't real different from our ninth and tenth graders that are still emergent readers in alternative education." Administrator three elaborated on their answer and described their undergraduate education as contributing to the following mind-set, "You're going to be working with kids that are all over the spectrum and you need to prepare yourself, you know, for the lowest kids and highest kids." Administrator three also noted how their undergraduate program included cultural competency courses and emphasized how working with the diversity of their students was a huge asset. Administrator three notes that viewing diversity of students as an asset " . . . was really woven into all of the classes." Through Administrator three's comments, was an expressed gratitude for their undergraduate courses and the surrounding support of colleagues.

As stated, Administrator three was not involved in any formal mentoring or induction program, however, during their interview Administrator three also spoke about attending the Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs (MAAP) State Conference and how early on the connections forged with the members really opened their eyes to what was occurring with SAAPs. Administration three said the MAAP State Conference created a network, in a way similar to an induction or mentoring program where they could seek information and help. Furthermore, for Administrator three involvement in the

MAAP State Conference and resulting network created a situation where they had a place to go. In their words the MAAP network created a situation where people said " . . . my door is open [people involved in the MAAP State Conference], if you have questions, come ask. And I did, I just kept asking."

      Choice in assignment. Administrator three dipped their toes into the world of SAAP's by teaching just one class. They taught that one class for numerous years before they were approached to enter the world of administration. The current administrator was leaving and the position needed to be filled. District administration recognized Administrator three's passions and skills so the job description and position was crafted to fit their license and in administrator three's words, "I haven't looked back. It's been a good journey."

      Educational philosophy. An important aspect of Administrator three's educational philosophy is the idea that there is not one system that meets the needs of all learners. This idea is summarized in the following quote;

> I know that the impression is out there about what alternative schools are and even amongst educators, the impression isn't correct always . . . The regular schools are great for the vast majority of kids, but these kids need something different and that's what we're here for.

Administrator three discussed the unique dynamic when working with traditional schools, "they don't understand what we do and they see, they just see us as numbers and I see it as kids and lives and we definitely have an impact."

In the following exchange Administrator three went on to share their philosophy surrounding testing.

Yeah, I've had the opportunity to go do something else . . . I would have to lie to get those jobs, because there's a lot of things that they're required to do in the public schools with all the focus on testing, which I thought was going away, which is stronger than ever, I don't believe in that. That isn't education, that's just quantifying something we're doing to prove that the money we're getting is, we're worthy of that, and I don't think that's the right direction for us to be going. I think what we do in alternative education is. So, philosophically, I have not been able in my mind to make that leap into the general education world. I do necessarily believe in the model.

Sense of community. Similar to Administrator one and two the analysis of this transcript also revealed the theme of community. For Administrator three the importance of building relationships with the students attending their school was a high priority. At the start of the interview Administrator three immediately spoke about how "Good staff . . . are committed to working with the kids that we get. That's really the number one thing." Administrator three described that building relationships with the students at their school was of the utmost importance. Administrator three also understood that this skill was not taught in all college preservice programs and some individuals, especially new teachers, did not come by it naturally. Given this Administrator three notes that coaching new teachers on how to be a "well boundary-ied friend of the students" was important and an appropriate goal for an induction and/or mentoring program. Administrator three

summed up their feelings regarding the importance of teacher/learner relationships by saying, "Because that is the basis of what we do [building relationships], . . . and I think the only way the kid respects you is if they know you're willing to be there with them and have that relationship with them."

Professional satisfaction. Administrator three felt strongly that *they* [legislators, superintendents, parents] "need to keep letting us do what we're doing and trust us." When reflecting on why they remain at their school instead of capitalizing on the jobs offered to them at other schools, they felt compelled to share how passionate they were about remaining at their school and why it was so important to them.

> There are all these things we do not have, but there are all these things we do have, and you know, the lives that we impact might not be as many as you would at a big school, but the number of those kids who come back, who really appreciate what you did, is amazing. And that's, I tell the staff here, that is the juice that keeps us going.

They went on to elaborate,

> And I think the students who have been here, and the families that have had students here, and the continued connection with them after their gone, letting us know . . . you helped me graduate . . . so that stuff really keeps you going.

The best way to end Administrator three's professional satisfaction is their quote, "This is what I want to do, my calling is more with these kids."

Summary of this interview. Recurring in the Administrative three's interview was the unique paths to their SAAP and to the role of administration. Particular to

Administrator three's and Administrator four's interviews was the consideration of staff

stress and the mental health of the students in alternative education. While this was not

explicitly described by Administrator one and two, based on my work in alternative

education I know that this is a concern of many in our community.

Administrator Four

Administrator four was my final administrator interview. It was conducted after I

had conducted two teacher interviews. It also occurred during the school year but on a

non school day. This allowed the interview to be conducted at a leisurely pace. Unique to

this interview was that it took place at a busy and loud venue. Nonetheless, it did not faze

Administrator four and they willingly answered each question in depth. Administrator

four has been at their SAAP for more than ten years.

Factors that influenced their career choice of becoming an educator.

Administrator four always wanted to be a teacher but in their words, had some life

diversions, including working in research and exploring other careers before eventually

deciding on a career in teaching. They began college right out of high school, decided to

leave college, got married, started a family and worked in a different industry for several

years. When Administrator four went back to school to be a teacher, their drive and

determination was evident. They figured out how to work at university jobs to mitigate

the cost of tuition and also commuted to school from their home an hour each way.

In addition to earning a degree in elementary education and a special education

license, Administrator four also worked in a variety of educational settings. After gaining

experience as a teacher Administrator four also obtained an additional teaching license.

Induction and mentor programs. Administrator four like many of the participants interviewed was not part of a formal mentor program. In fact, they were not treated well by some members of the staff and were provided with outdated and unusable resources. Throughout Administrator four's interview their devotion and dedication to students was evident. When speaking about mentors, and the lack of usable resources, again their dedication prevailed. They threw out the outdated materials and began from scratch and "learned, actually learned from other people . . . what they were using for the curriculum and quickly found the right materials." They were so successful in creating materials that the members of the staff who were not welcoming to Administrator four ended up wanting to use their newly created curriculum materials.

Now, reflecting back, Administrator four felt that when working with a mentor, it should be one that "understands the emotional, social, and behavioral needs of the kids . . . the relationship piece versus someone that knows the content." As a researcher I interpreted this to mean that guiding and mentoring goes beyond academics. New teachers need support in all areas.

Choice in assignment. Administrator four had experience in numerous educational settings before they were exposed to alternative education. Once they were introduced to this model, "I immediately knew that this was my people."

Like Administrator three, Administrator four mentioned The Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs (MAAP) annual state conference where they learned about the different Area Learning Center programs throughout the state. Administrator four went back to their district and said, "Hey, here is some information on these middle

school alternative programs and I really think we need to do this." Administrator four was told no, but just as they had persevered and completed their educational degree, they went back to the MAAP conference the next year learned more and gathered more information and went back to their district and said, "I really think we need to investigate this, I think it could be very beneficial." Administrator four was given the blessing to then begin an alternative program.

The journey did not end there. They did not go through the official SAAP program but followed previous models and started a middle level program and led it successfully for numerous years. Then the call came encouraging Administrator four to apply to lead the high school SAAP. Again, just as Administrator three, even though they did not have a principal license, they were still encouraged to apply for this position and were hired. Administrator four said, "you know, that was fourteen years ago. And I love the student population, I love the ability to have the flexibility to meet kids' needs on a dime and change and I always kinda, take the corner off of something so it's not so sharp or abrasive for kids."

Educational philosophy. The discussion of Administrator four's educational philosophy was teased out from their description of some great ideas to increase exposure to alternative education and advocate for placement of teachers. Administrator four believes we should reach out to secondary institutions to expand their educational programs and give education majors exposure to alternative education. Included in this exposure would be a required rotation of student teachers to spend time in alternative education classrooms. Administrator four also would like to see a course or a portion of a

course during undergraduate pre-service work providing information about SAAPs. With these additions Administrator four thought there would be increased opportunities to recruit teachers. This advocacy would extend all the way through the interview process. During any interviewing within the district Administrator four always includes questions pertaining to alternative education. Administrator four's strong advocacy extended all the way to legislation. "Well, I just think that alternative ed needs some . . . specific funding for its regular programming so that we can really meet the needs of kids in either form or currency or time."

Sense of community. When Administrator four was asked about what was present to meet their needs so that they remain there, their response was,

> you know what, I would say, number one, the students, because they're just my people. And then the staff. We've been very fortunate to have very little staff turnover . . . we weren't the victims of the district where they send ineffective teachers.

This is such a powerful statement that in fact encapsulated much of the researchers desire to begin this qualitative research.

Administrator four went on to define ineffective teachers to mean teachers who do not understand the "relationship piece versus someone who knows the content . . . because content knowledge does not matter, it's really about the type of personality and individual, can't have egomanics or control freaks, because that is a problem right out of the chute."

Professional satisfaction. When Administrator four was asked why they stay and continue to lead their SAAP they replied, "Well, because I feel like the mission's not over with yet. And yeah, not even close." Administrator four is also compelled to continue to improve and create. "I stay, because I think there's still the opportunity to create a better program . . . And then it's you know, it's the kids, too, and our teaching staff . . . I stay for them." Administrator four's interview ended just as it had begun, with them speaking about students and their true grit. Just as was evident with Administrator one, Administrator four's perseverance and tenacity are clear to see.

Summary of this interview. Administrator four left an impression of tenacity and can do just as Administrator one. Also similar was their unique path into education and administration.

Summary of the Administrative Interviews

Through the analysis of the administrative interviews a common theme among the administrators was the history of educators among their extended families and the knowledge that for as long as they could remember, the desire to follow in their family members footsteps to be a teacher. Administrator one said it best "As a young child, I always wanted to be a teacher, I always found myself playing school all the time . . . so the longest I can remember, I always wanted to be a teacher."

Involvement in induction programs and formalized mentor programs varied among the administrators but all of them were quick to mention individuals that had opened their doors and provided support. This is also the area where narratives kept emerging surrounding the MAAP organization and the abundant networking

opportunities it provided and the relationships created as another avenue of mentorship and support.

Encapsulating all of the administrator interviews was the choice in assignment. Every administrator was sincere in the fact that they had chosen to work at their SAAP and are almost vehemently in staying! This passion and this mission had come even if initially they had not known what a SAAP was. The quote "I immediately knew this was my people" from Administrator four endorses this mission.

As with induction and mentor programs, there were nuances in the administrators educational philosophy. Administrator three spoke fervidely about mandated testing and their disagreement with that. Administrators one and two talked about the top down hierarchy in K-12 education and their desire to flatten that hierarchy. Administrators three and four touched on the mental health of students and how that impacts the role and stress level of teachers.

When reading the anecdotes shared in the interviews surrounding the theme of community, all of the administrators mentioned students, staff and families. The relationship building lasts a lifetime.

A resounding item that stood out in the administrator data analysis was the high level of professional satisfaction. Independence or freedom at the forefront. Bringing my administrator lens to the analysis led me to conclude that there are three components to this independence. For example, one component is linked to my interpretation: the independence the participants described was a level of freedom as a leader described during the interview. For example, Administrator two noted having the freedom to

operate outside of the traditional K-12 public school system. A second component of the independence described during the interviews is the freedom as a leader to make unique decisions. The third component of the idea of being independent as leaders was the freedom to level the hierarchy between teaching staff and administration.

Conclusively, as a researcher there were two quotes that encapsulated this high level of satisfaction, "This is what I want to do. My calling is more with these kids." and "Well, because I feel like the mission's not over with yet. And yeah, not even close."

Analyses of Teacher Interviews

Three interviews were conducted with participants teaching at the time of the interview. Again, in the state where this research was conducted the SAAP community is small. While this limited the sample size for this research the researcher still set out to have a representative group. One male and two female teachers were interviewed. All of the teachers had more than fifteen years of experience. The SAAPs where the participants worked were located across the state and the size and the format of their program varied.

During the analysis, as a researcher and a teacher at heart, having spent more than 30-years in K-12 education I was inspired and reaffirmed by the lived experiences shared during the interviews. Again, as a researcher, many of the specific details of each interview were not disclosed to maintain and protect the anonymity of the individuals as confidentiality of participants was paramount.

As with the administrators, during the analysis, a telling theme emerged that I had eagerly anticipated. All of the teachers' narratives heavily involved the community found in their schools; relationships between the teachers, teachers and students, as well as the

relationships students built together. Teachers used terms such as family, team, and personal relationships to convey how connected they were and how the community as a whole related to one another.

One component that I had not anticipated to uncover in the analysis of the teacher transcripts was the level of freedom and its link to teacher satisfaction. The freedom these teachers noted related to their ability to operate outside of the traditional K-12 school system, and their ability to be creative and meet standards in their own way.

Lastly, an item that continued to recur while analyzing the interviews the teachers mentioned loving what they did and how rewarding their days were.

Teacher One

This was the first teacher I interviewed. It took place before I finished the administrator interviews. It was actually the longest interview conducted for this research study. It also took place during the school year in the dead of winter at the end of the student day. Teacher one welcomed me in as a researcher sharing their space and their student projects. This welcome set a positive tone for the interview and the answers flowed freely. Teacher one has been at a SAAP for more than 15 years.

Factors that influenced their career choice of becoming an educator. When Teacher one was asked about their journey to becoming a teacher they did not begin by discussing how they had come from a long line of educators instead they described knowing they would always be a teacher as they worked their way through their undergraduate degree. In fact, they did not start out in the school of education. With that

being said, factors that did permeate throughout their choices was their compassion and that they, "like kids."

Induction and mentor programs. When Teacher one was asked if they were part of a formal or informal mentor program, there was a laugh and a strong "No, nothing!" Teacher one then became serious and went on to elaborate that the director that initially hired them wanted to craft a completely unique program "untainted by veteran teachers with their ways." They continued to reflect and shared that they had no mentors and no one came in to observe them. In Teacher one's opinion, there was no formal mentor program and that was very intentional. However, Teacher one also noted that,

> Finally about halfway through the year, the school district did not think that was
> okay [lack of mentoring for new teachers], and they did team us up with veteran
> teachers so eventually we did end up with a mentor. But, like most mentor
> programs, it was very loose.

Teacher one went on to state clearly that they initially did not participate in a formal mentor program and when they were assigned a formal mentor it was very loose and perhaps ineffectual. The following comment from Teacher one was taken as a description of their reasoning why their program or mentoring programs in general can be ineffective. According to Teacher one, "too many mentoring programs are, you meet with the person, you work on their portfolio, you just walk them through, it's a program of convenience." When prompted further, Teacher one after more than 30 years in the field of education had some thoughts on the attributes of an effective formal mentor program.

Teacher one described an effective mentoring program where "what you need to do is have a mentoring program where you work on problems . . . working with teachers helping them with those things so they can have some sense of security and classroom management and then resources." Teacher one continued on stating,

We get signed up to help mentor and stuff like that, the new people, and go through the simple stuff, but when you get to supporting them, if you can in any way help them reflect on the experience and process it, then you're kind of making progress and progress. Self-reflection for new teachers is, I think, really important because sometimes they don't grasp what just happened.

Choice in assignment. Teacher one like many of the administrators interviewed was essentially recruited for the teaching position at the SAAP. The principal at the time reposted the position and tried to convince Teacher one that "working with at-risk kids at these new things called Area Learning Centers (ALCs) was a great idea." Teacher one had never heard of an ALC. They matter of factly said, "And so, that's how I got here . . ." and I said, "Okay."

Educational philosophy. As noted in the introduction, Teacher one has been in education for more than 30 years. With this vast amount of time brings a firm philosophy. Teacher one began sharing about working in a SAAP by stating, "I believe strongly that these kids need teachers who really like them." Moreover, Teacher one felt that,

Kids keep changing. They're different than they were. They still have needs. It almost always goes back to [their] family . . . they're either pretty lonely, or they need love and structure so bad, they haven't had it. Somewhere I read for these

kids it takes about a month for each year of their life to kind of turn the corner if

they're really struggling.

Reflecting further Teacher one,

But you know, how do you still reach those individual needs? And that's where

the art of teaching comes in, that, making those decisions and being flexible and,

you know, we always talk about building relationships, that's obviously, with

these kids, if they don't have a relationship with you, you don't have much luck.

As a researcher having known Teacher one for over 25 years and being well into the

interview, when Teacher one was asked about how to retain teachers at SAAPs their

response was immediate,

We lose teachers due to chaos. Behaviors can be a problem, attendance can be a

problem, mental health can be a problem, and when you're trying to teach a class

and you walk in a room on Tuesday and its different kids that were in your room

Monday and you're trying to do a lesson or work through a unit, it drives you

crazy.

Teacher one's experience and benevolence illuminated their features when they went on

to reflect on their students,

We get a lot of kids who come in here who, two years down the road are thriving.

But they were a train wreck when they came in, so I think time, understanding

you're not going to fix them overnight, is important. And then having that

relationship is huge. But within that structure, they need structure.

Sense of community. Teacher one echoed the words of each administrator interviewed when they exclaimed, "We have a fantastic staff right now, we're really close. So, that keeps me here. And I still like these kids, I have a passion for these kids, and this is where these kids are." Teacher one referred to their colleagues not only as friends, but family. When the researcher asked Teacher one what they meant by that, the heartful response was, "Oh, you're going to make me cry." Once they composed themselves they shared,

> We all get along with each other, everyone is really supportive of each other, and encouraging of each other . . . We're like, you know, you become five best friends because you're with each other all day, every day, and everyone's solid and helps each other and encourages each other and is really easy to work with.

Professional satisfaction. Remaining for more than 30 years in one profession and continuing to possess a passion for the craft was interpreted as a testament to how much professional satisfaction. Teacher one felt working at their SAAP. That satisfaction took hold that first year and has continued to build. In their words, "the first year we really didn't have a director, we had . . . rookie teachers start a program. So, that kept me here because I had tremendous amount of ownership in the program because I started it, I invented it." This passion was flowing out of Teacher one with each answer. Evidence of this passion continued to be evident in how Teacher's one hobbies are integrated into the curriculum in the form of adventures and field trips for their students. "That independent study era was so fun because you were just encouraged to see what a kid's passion was and then try to design projects, activities, learning situations that engaged them." At this

point in the interview Teacher one pointed out four quality projects that they had kept and

reminisced about the learning that had taken place in the construction of the piece.

Teacher one brought their hobbies to the students and in the process built connections

with kids, fostered new hobbies for students all leading to a greater sense of personal

satisfaction.

Furthermore, as Teacher one continued to ruminate on why they remain at a

SAAP they stated,

I stay here because I like to. I've had numerous opportunities to go to the high

school or the middle school because I have so much seniority and there have been

options you know, people have asked, and I've never wanted to. It goes back to

part of the ownership thing. And I really do like these kids, I always have.

Following the previous statement Teacher one sat forward in their chair as they proudly

shared,

I wired this building, we built our first router and server, and you know we were

doing all sorts of stuff and that kind of ownership, freedom and ability to be

creative . . . that was really appealing to me." Following up that description

almost with a sigh, "Yeah, it was my program, and that kept me here for a long

time."

Summary of this interview. The items that resonated with the researcher when

compiling the data provided by Teacher one was their compassion, ownership of the

program and the ability to be creative. Teacher one almost teared up when they spoke

about the strong bond of the staff and how when one of their extended family members

hurts, they all feel that hurt. Along those same lines, Teacher one gave an earnest

explanation of the educators that influenced them at the beginning of their career and the

lasting impact they had.

Teacher Two

Teacher two's interview also took place before the researcher finished the final

administrative interview. Additionally, this interview took place on a non student day on

a bench in a busy hallway. None of these factors rattled Teacher two as they ignored the

distractions present and readily answered each question. Their honest and earnest

recollections provided a wealth of data. Teacher two has been at a SAAP for more than

15 years.

Factors that influenced their career choice of becoming an educator. Teacher

two did come from a family where a parent was a teacher but was not immediately drawn

to the profession wanting to forge a new path, "So, I went to college having no idea what

I wanted to do . . . I started off taking general classes." Although they did not totally

discount a career as an educator. While taking their general education classes they took

an introduction to education class and enjoyed it and could see themselves doing that.

Induction and mentor program. When asked about courses offered during their

undergraduate degree that may have aided their transition into teaching at SAAP, Teacher

two reflected back and shared that during the hours they were required to shadow another

teacher, an alternative program was never mentioned. For Teacher two the lack of

exposure to a SAAP during the shadowing experience was unfortunate and described

how it could have been an option and would have given a different experience in the classroom.

During Teacher two's first years of working at a SAAP there was no formal induction program but staff did informally help them learn the ropes. Teacher two described those first years as "it was sort of 'sink or swim.' " As a staff they met once a week to discuss student concerns and mentioned that "if you need something, everyone is willing to help you." Teacher two shared honestly that they found it challenging as a beginning teacher to admit that they needed help. To explain further, with no formal mentor assigned to them, Teacher two fresh out of college, felt intimidated to reach out to someone older with a vast amount of experience and admit to needing guidance.

As the research interview progressed, Teacher two shared that they now have a better mentor program than when they first started. They themselves have now gone through formal mentor training and have guided a mentee. Staff is willing to help a new teacher but with a formal mentor program that includes training and additional pay has created a better program. Teacher two described how their formal mentor training program is " . . . much better thing than what I experienced."

Choice in assignment. After graduating Teacher two interviewed at a traditional high school but felt that the interview did not go well and did not feel that the teaching position was the perfect fit for them. While reading the newspaper they saw an ad for a long term substitute teacher at an ALC. Teacher two, just like Teacher one had no idea of the nature of an ALC and connected this to how "throughout my whole college, ALCs were never mentioned or any of the ed classes or anything like that. I didn't even know

that was an option as somewhere to work." After seeing the ad for the substitute position Teacher two conducted research and gathered all the information they could and decided to interview for the position.

During the interview they asked questions about how things worked and what the students were like. They were hired on the spot. Teacher two went from a long term substitute to a permanent teacher with a part-time contract, then to a combination between the traditional high school and the ALC and finally to a full-time position at the ALC. Teacher two's heart shone through in their reflection of their interview process and their career.

> I just stayed, I fell in love with the kids and I loved the directors that were there
> and how the school ran . . . and I've just kind of continued working ever since,
> and now I think there's only one person who's been there longer than me.

> **Educational philosophy.** Teacher two's description of their educational

philosophy aligned with that of other participants regarding the value of their undergraduate education and its applicability in the SAAP setting. Like others interviewed for this research Teacher two described how

> We kinda joked that, forget everything you learned in college because none of it's
> going to apply in this job . . . . The things that you did in your classroom thirty
> years ago is not going to work in the classroom here.

My interpretation of this comment was that working in the SAAP setting required a different view of learning and the roles of administrators, teachers, and learners.

Admittedly, in certain areas, Teacher two's survey responses revealed just as much data as their interview responses. The survey question, *Based on your experience working at a SAAP please describe the two most important characteristics of a teacher whose students make progress towards graduation* really brought out Teacher two's philosophical beliefs and echoed the words the researcher heard from Teacher one. Teacher two first listed *Flexibility.* Those unfamiliar with this school of thought may be interested to know that it basically boils down to,

> So many things happen to disrupt our day, our students' lives, we need to learn to just go with the flow. If a lesson has to be changed last minute to fit what's going on with the student, then that needs to happen. We need to make accommodations for these students.

In addition to flexibility, another aspect of educational philosophy described during the interviews of both Teacher one and Teacher two was the importance of demonstrating caring and compassion for their students.

Teacher two described how in their experience, "Students will work a lot harder in my class if they know that I truly care about how they are doing and genuinely push them towards their goals." This point was further emphasized by explaining, "This might mean taking a day to just talk with them about issues in their lives, but in the end they will try harder and put more effort forward if they know you are truly committed to them graduating."

Sense of community. At the core of this research was the question, *How do you think SAAPs could retain teachers?* Teacher two immediately responded, "biggest

reasons I see . . . it's knowing I can form relationships with those students . . . I think too, the staff." Teacher Two elaborated on the importance of forming relationships with all members of their staff by stating,

> We just are such a close knit [community], that if anyone were to leave, it would be rough. That's another reason I stay. The people I work with. I would hang out with them on days we don't have school just because I like those people and we have formed great relationships.

Teacher two summarizes the importance of being in a community in their continuing to work at the SAAP by saying, "those [sense of community] are probably the biggest things, the students and the staff are two huge components."

Professional satisfaction. During the interview, Teacher two attributed their professional satisfaction to three things. One, similar to Teacher one, Teacher two also stressed the freedom to create and its impact on the satisfaction they feel in their profession. During the interview Teacher two described how ". . . giving that freedom and seeing that our kids are like, I can read, or I can like a book, you know, because they come so beaten down." A second reason described by Teacher two contributing to their professional satisfaction was, "having access to technology and new things, being able to come to conferences [professional] and continual learning things, that's a big deal, too."

A third reason noted in Teacher two's transcript was having flexibility at work and how work at the SAAP frequently changed. According to Teacher Two experiencing flexibility and change " . . . just keeps it more exciting as a teacher I guess too, that you're

not teaching the exact same things all the time that you can bring in some other elements as well."

Summary of this interview. Teacher two adamantly repeated what Teacher one had shared in the strong bond of the staff. Their relationship with the other teachers was paramount. Teacher two described this bond by saying, "The teachers that work in my building right now too, like, we are all really good friends." They expanded this notion to explain that they would even get together outside of school hours.

Teacher two just as much as Teacher one conveyed a need for and a satisfaction in the freedom provided while teaching at a SAAP. As a researcher this perceived freedom was not found in the traditional educational setting.

Teacher Three

Teacher three was my final interview. It was overall my second longest interview. It was only slightly shorter than Teacher one. It also took place in the evening after Teacher three had not only taught school all day, they also had taught a night school class that evening. It was a dark and damp winter night yet none of this deterred Teacher three from wholeheartedly participating in the interview process. Their energy and their willingness to be a part of the research was extraordinary. Teacher three has been at a SAAP for more than 15 years.

Factors that influenced their career choice of becoming an educator. Teacher three began their interview clearly stating, "I think I always wanted to be a teacher. I was one of those kids that played school when I was younger." Teacher three like many of the participants in this research had come from a family filled with members that had chosen

a career in education. Teacher three's extended family tree contained a superintendent, a principal, and a teacher that they viewed as role models. In addition to the respected family members, the influence of having good teachers impacted their decision to choose the educational field as well.

Induction and mentor programs. Teacher three participated in a year-long internship where they were able to work with elementary, middle and high school students. They felt that this internship opportunity set them immediately up for success. Teacher three also reflected back to their undergraduate courses that had impacted them. Teacher three remembered a testing class that was difficult but powerful and felt that it had impacted them a lot. I am remiss that I did not probe further to see what specifically had made that course impactful. As I continue to hone my skills as an interviewer, I will get better at recognizing these opportunities to collect pertinent information.

Teacher three then went on to reminisce about a human resource course that covered cultural items and accepting everyone. Teacher three believed this was very important and everyone should have a course like this.

Teacher three then moved from reflecting on their undergraduate time to induction programs. Their district had a two-hour in-service for all teachers. It contained general classroom management and self-care information. As a researcher when I questioned Teacher three on the relevance of the induction programming to working in a SAAP. there was a resounding, "No, no."

The interview then moved into mentorship. Teacher three was not part of a formal mentor program. When the program started there were three teachers two of the teachers,

including Teacher three, were new to the profession. The third more experienced teacher fell into a mentorship role out of necessity. The more experienced teacher stressed the mentality that there was always an exception and to think out of the box was instilled. That teacher left after one year so the informal mentorship was brief. However, Teacher three echoed what I had heard from Teacher two that a mentor program is vitally important but that the appropriate pairing of individuals was imperative.

Both Teacher two and Teacher three spoke of an unsuccessful pairing of an aging experienced mentor being placed with a young inexperienced mentee who had totally different styles and personalities that had a detrimental impact on the new inexperienced teacher. Teacher three shared that the new teacher "thought she was doing everything wrong." Teacher three believes you need to "do what works for you, what you're natural[ly good] at." Teacher three's solution to this challenge was to have a second mentor to let the mentee process through their work and to know, "it'll be okay, believe in yourself."

Teacher three felt that mentor programs should move beyond teacher coaching, they wanted teachers to be able to see other SAAP programs to know what they were doing and to see what the differences were.

Choice in assignment. Through Teacher three's reflection on their numerous years in the profession and their choice in teaching assignments made it evident to the interviewer that Teacher three had been able to choose their path in the state where the research took place and in other states. Additionally, they had also chosen whether they taught in the traditional system or in an alternative setting. In fact, they were on the cusp

of the start of SAAPs in the state where the research took place and had started and ran

more than one alternative program in their district. As I have mentioned numerous times,

as a researcher maintaining the anonymity of my participants is vitally important and I

am unable to share anymore information regarding Teacher three's choice in assignments

for fear of divulging their identity.

Educational philosophy. Teacher three's entire interview was interspersed with

moments of their educational philosophy peeking through. When discussing

undergraduate courses Teacher three's sentiments were, "I don't know if you can teach it

really, but stressing the importance of flexibility." They expanded, "Sometimes people

just get too stuck on, what do you mean, our schedules aren't going to be done on the first

day of the trimester? Go with it, go with the flow, it's okay."

As a researcher when I asked Teacher three what elements were present in their

school so that they remain, again their philosophy shined bright. Teacher three was ardent

in their reply when they said,

> Just believe in yourself and do what you're doing. We're making curriculum most
>
> of the time. So, a new teacher, maybe preparing them, sometimes you have to, it's
>
> not just, here's a textbook, or here's a new computer program. Be prepared to
>
> create and research for your own curriculum. But that's why I like it, because you
>
> can always change it up.

Sense of community. As a researcher I knew that Teacher three held the

community in high regard. As I have explained, prior to my interviews I sent out a brief

survey to participants gathering information. In my survey I asked, *Based on your*

experience working in a SAAP, please describe the two most important characteristics of a teacher whose students make progress towards graduation. Teacher three responded with flexibility and positive relationships with students and staff. Immediately referencing relationships and how important the community that is built. This sense of community/relationships was embedded throughout this interview.

Teacher three began with their students. ". . . I like them to know that you [students] were really special to me, you meant a lot to me. So it's kind of nice when they come back and say, no, you meant a lot to me." Teacher three continued on sharing about the importance of community and the environment created within the school by using the windows and mirrors metaphor. This metaphor has come to signify, *A **mirror** is a story that reflects your own culture and helps you build your identity. A **window** is a resource that offers you a view into someone else's experience.* Teacher three fondly reflected upon the times that students have shared with them how cool the posters around the school show the teachers really care because they are so diverse.

Teacher three continued warmly, "I think the staff here, we all like what we're doing and so we have been one key point in our district." Teacher three ended their response by saying "I just think you have to have that relationship where we're working together, so it's not administration versus teachers." This philosophy on the hierarchy was first mentioned by Administrator two. Teacher three expanded their thoughts on community to encompass the statewide alternative community and their willingness to engage in "Curriculum sharing, connect people, email address exchanges, maybe allow some money so you can go see other programs, because I think that's important, too."

Another aspect of the importance of community described by Teacher three was how they could "Call someone up, what kind of programs do you have? Do you have seat-based, do you have independent study?" In fact, Teacher three continued that sentiment all the way to their home. "It's important to have somebody at work that you connect well with but also have a good support system at home."

As our interview was coming to an end, Teacher three upon further reflection interjected,

I do like the friendships, though. It's so nice going, all right, I know these people from . . . Even when our kids go from one ALC to the next, that helps them make them feel welcomed here, because, oh, yeah, you know so and so? And they're like yeah, I do, I had them as a teacher, So, that's good.

Professional satisfaction. Teacher three was my final interview of this study and I found many of the same sentiments/reflections being echoed in other interviews. Also apparent as a researcher was how closely tied the themes of educational philosophy, community, and personal satisfaction are tied together. As I was reading through the interviews and coding them many times I wanted to place quotes into each of those categories. Once was contingent upon the other, significantly enmeshed with each other.

Teacher three paralleled Teacher one as they reverbated views on creative opportunities and activities with students. Teacher three described how "I got to do a lot of cool things with them [students]. . . take them on week-long trips, create a catering club, I did a lot of after school activities with them." Teacher passionately mused, "I think it's the small classroom sizes, the one-on-one relationships you can get, and a big reason

why I've stayed in alternative ed is you have so much flexibility and I believe a lot of learning goes on outside of the classroom."

This position continued to appear in the interview when as a researcher I asked, "What elements are present in your school that meet your needs so that you remain there?" Teacher three again went back to the inclination that it is always about relationships. "I think the relationships with students, the relationships with teachers." Many reasons streamed out, "I still have the flexibility to go and do different projects, small class sizes, just, the kid's stories."

Teacher three also paralleled many of the interviews when bringing up MAAP and MAAP Success Teamwork Achievement Recognition Self esteem (STARS). Administrators and teachers alike brought up the statewide professional organization MAAP and the youth organization MAAP STARS. The administrator and teachers alike mentioned MAAPs networking opportunities, wealth of information and resources, support, and the open door of members.

Additionally, Teacher three championed,

I like, I like, the diversity. I like a little bit of the behavior challenges. I like when they connect and when you can come back and say, hey, did you know I'm a manager here because you helped me get this job? Or, I'm in school, I went to school and you think, yep, I knew you could do it. Or they, I saw last night somebody put on Facebook, it was because of you that I got to graduate, you know, and I was like, oh, that's nice.

Furthermore, Teacher three felt that they still got to teach the subject they were passionate about.

When asked about recruiting new teachers to SAAPs, again Teacher three's personal satisfaction showed through with their immediate response of,

Oh, I just love it. Give it a try . . . tell them, I don't feel like I'm going to work, I like coming here . . . Get involved with MAAP STARS, get involved with MAAP . . . have those connections, do the networking . . . I always like the networking.

Teacher three also mentioned more than once, the small class sizes and the one-on-ones [when working with students].

The interview came full circle at this point back to the students when Teacher three gushed,

Why I stay in alternative ed, because the kids do get the feeling, everything I do is making me move forward versus I spent how many weeks here and now I'm sick and I missed a week and a half of school and now I'm just going to fail the class, you know. Nope, pick it up, keep going. So you're progressing all the time. That's a positive attribute.

Summary of Teacher Interviews

Examining the anecdotes of the teacher narratives left the researcher with thoughts swirling around the themes of relationships, students and thriving. Prevalent in the teacher interviews was the lack of exposure to SAAPs in their undergraduate degrees and at the start of their career search. Additionally, the teachers collectively felt strongly about mentor programs, precisely, the proper pairing of individuals and the devotion to

the program, as Teacher one reasoned, not just going through the motions, or "A program of convenience." In two of the administrative interviews the desire to flatten the traditional hierarchical structure came to light. This desire to level the hierarchy also appeared in Teacher three's interview.

When taking in the information given surrounding the teachers professional satisfaction they mentioned possessing flexibility and meeting students where they are at. All three teachers' data analysis showed flexibility to go with the flow of the day and to utilize the teachable moments that occurred. In Teacher two's narrative they talked about how some days were spent on more on the issues in the students lives then academics and the value of that.

Summary of Chapter Four

Determinedly, Chapter Four comprised the data analysis of the online survey and the seven interviews conducted for this research study. The desire to keep all participants anonymous was imperative. The narratives produced a complete picture of the participant's reasoning behind remaining at a SAAP and their magnitude of professional fulfilment.

Chapter Five will provide research findings. It will contain details and specifics about the larger impact of this research, the lessons learned and future recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary of Findings

Introduction to Chapter Five

This research explored *How do administrators and teachers with ten or more years of experience at the same State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP) explain their decision to stay with that program and their level of professional fulfillment.* Additionally this research was designed to deepen the understanding of the following secondary questions; by researching:

- *How do the participants describe the path that led them to teach at a SAAP and why they stay?*

- *How do the participants describe their preparation during their pre-service program to work with the at-risk population at a SAAP?*

- *How do the participants describe the nature of their on-board training or mentorship at a SAAP?*

- *How do the participants describe their level of professional fulfilment at a SAAP?*

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach searching for detailed narratives from teachers and administrators in a SAAP combined with previous research that describes elements likely to attract, create success, and retain teachers in these programs.

This chapter will explain the historical landscape that was occurring during this research and how that collided with the researcher's professional journey. It will also contain the connections to the literature, limitations of the study, a plan for communicating the data, implications for stakeholders, recommendations for future research, and will conclude with a reflection of lessons learned as a researcher.

Impact of Larger Context on My Dissertation Journey

The journey of writing my dissertation has been a long and winding path filled with peaks and valleys. When choosing a research question I was an experienced teacher having taught in the same State Approved Alternative Program (SAAP) my entire career. In 2018 when I selected my dissertation topic my career had spanned 27-years. There was a clear foundation of the choice to be a teacher, the conscious decision to work in alternative education, and the determination to remain. My core values had driven my life to a career that had become more than what I do, it was also who I am; instilling in me a need to know why others had chosen to be educators in alternative education and why they chose to stay. The research on SAAPs, at-risk, and alternative education is limited. With this innate drive, came the resolution to use a qualitative research approach allowing me to collect in depth narratives bringing to light the reasons a small group of teachers and administrators remain working in a SAAP. My desire was to gather these rich lived narratives of individuals that had spent significant years at a SAAP to share statewide with other SAAP's. As a researcher, I desired to discover what contributed to the participants' professional satisfaction. The pieces in these narratives provide a wealth

of information which can then be used to fill in the gaps of literature and increase the retention of teachers.

As my dissertation research path evolved, my personal life underwent some major changes. I completed the coursework necessary to receive my administrative license and in 2018-2019 was chosen first as an assistant principal and then in 2019-2020 as the head principal of the SAAP I had poured my heart and soul into. During my first year as the head principal two major events occurred, one completing my last qualitative interview on February 27th, 2020 and two, the COVID pandemic.

A mere two weeks later, after the final interview for my dissertation was completed, on March 15th, our district's administrative team was called in on a Sunday, to work together to move forward safely under the Governor's Executive Order directing Minnesotans to Stay Safe at Home. A Global Pandemic had hit the United States. At that moment in time my dissertation took a back seat. Instead of focusing on it, all of my energy went into keeping my family healthy while also ensuring the students and staff I was blessed to lead were safe and still receiving a quality education. My dissertation sat idle. I had attempted some transcription of my interviews with little to no success. Months went by with no progress. The possibility of not completing my dissertation was quickly becoming a reality.

Fast forward to February 27, 2021. I hired a professional transcriptionist, read and coded my interviews for themes, data, and information all while walking alongside an amazing team of educators to bring students back into our school buildings to thrive and flourish in the Pandemic. I was in my third year of administration, having spent one year

as an assistant principal and now in the second year as a head principal proudly becoming a 30-year educator. I had found the balance needed to effectively lead while continuing to write my dissertation.

Connection of Research Findings to the Literature

I spent an exorbitant amount of time searching for sources to complete my literature review and support my research. Even as a novice researcher, from the start of the dissertation process there was a recognition that my literature review was going to be challenging. My first struggle was finding the correct keywords to locate any studies or literature to support and ground my research. I used the words alternative, high-needs, teacher retention, and teacher recruitment but only located a few sources or previous research studies.

However, while completing my review of the research literature three or four researchers emerged who should be considered essential reading. The most prevalent researcher was Richard Ingersoll (1999, 2001) who worked individually or in collaboration with Thomas Smith (2003, 2004) and published four scholarly articles spanning eight years. Richard Ingersoll's work began in 1999 with the scholarly article, *The problem of underqualified teachers in American secondary schools*. Ingersoll, (2001) then continued his research with, *Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis.* Ingersoll then combined with Thomas Smith (2003) to research and publish, *The wrong solution to the teacher shortage.* Lastly, Ingersoll and Smith, (2004). *Do teachers' induction and mentoring matter?* In addition to research conducted by Ingersoll and Smith, the 2012 scholarly work of Petty, Fitchett, and O'Connor,

Attracting and Keeping Teachers in High-Need Schools is also a quantitative study that researchers interested in SAAP's should consider a foundational background. Based on my experience completing the literature review, future researchers interested in SAAP's should start with and follow the work of these authors. Therefore, as stated at the beginning of Chapter Five, with the limited literature available, future researchers can use my review of literature as a starting point when studying SAAPs.

Limitations of the Study

There were two limitations to my study. The first limitation I addressed earlier in Chapter Five when reporting on my literature review. There is not an abundance of literature to support or refute my study.

Accordingly, the second limitation to the study was the small sample size. The researcher only collected seven surveys and conducted seven interviews. Even as a novice researcher I was able to recognize that a small sample size diminishes the potential of the study but felt confident that the value of the small SAAP community and the lived experiences of the veteran educators who participated provided significant data representative of a larger sample size. However, it is clear that additional qualitative research in different geographical contexts with larger samples is required. Even with this limitation, sharing the results of my dissertation with the SAAP community is important.

Plan for Communicating My Results

Every year the Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs (MAAP) hosts a statewide conference. Attending this conference are individuals directly in the target group related to this research study, those working in SAAPs and other alternative

schools (Contract Alternatives, ALPs and Charter Schools). This conference highlights research and development in alternative education. During this statewide conference, my plan as a current MAAP member would be to submit a presentation proposal to present my research during this three day event. During this conference practitioners, keynote speakers, and vendors share information leading the way in alternative education. As a practitioner and a member if my presentation proposal is accepted a 60-minute time slot will be open to all conference attendees to showcase my research and its results.

Additionally, in 2021 I was chosen as an Exemplary Award Recipient. This award is given to an individual who demonstrates outstanding dedication, service to and for commitment to alternative education. Receiving this recognition provides free conference fees to MAAP for the remainder of the recipients life. Thus, I will be able to attend the conference at no cost and share the results.

Implications for Stakeholders

One of my goals was that the findings of my research could impact numerous stakeholders. As a result of the data analysis it was apparent that many of the teachers and administrators interviewed shared that when they were in college and entering the workforce, they had no idea what a SAAP was. Many had made their way to their SAAPs either by accident or having been recruited. They explained that they would have never known to actively seek out employment outside of the traditional school setting. The fact that for my participants the phenomenon of SAAPs being anonymous needs to be corroborated with a larger sample but does lead to my first recommendation.

There is a need for university pre-service and graduate programs to build

partnerships with SAAPs. Creating these partnerships and requiring education students to spend time in alternative classrooms during teacher preparation programs could lead to SAAPs improving their ability to promote their programs, tell their stories, and potentially attract more teachers interested in working in the SAAP context.

Another recommendation based on the findings of this qualitative study is the importance of university education programs to ensure their coursework involves training to work with *all* students, not just students who excel in the traditional school setting. Enmeshed in this recommendation is the requirement to educate future teachers in human resources, and mental health, as well as academics. This recommendation is based on the details of the interview transcripts where all participants described how teaching is more than just imparting the academic standards tied to a teacher's discipline area. The participants in this study all described the connection between mental health needs and the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) of students and how if these are not met, they can become roadblocks to learning.

Also supported by my analysis of the interview transcripts was the participants' description of building relationships between themselves and their students and how this was conducive to students flourishing and learning. These are not just relationships that occur in the classroom as every teacher and administrator interviewed for this study described how these relationships extended beyond the classroom. One participant spoke about being asked by a student to be a sponsor for confirmation. After first contemplating if this was crossing a line or not, the individual decided "You know what, if I'm that important to her, yeah, I'll be your confirmation sponsor. Let's do it." The analysis of the

participant's interviews also leads to a recommendation for school districts related to mentoring programs.

Every interview conducted with the participants in this study contained a depiction of their probationary years and the lost opportunity to participate in a formal mentor program. As a researcher reflecting on their narratives it seems clear that these participants would have benefited from a formal mentoring program specific and relevant to life at a SAAP. Working in an alternative setting for 30-years it is evident that being an educator in this setting comes with differing complexity then in a traditional model. While the participants in this study did not participate in a formal mentoring program, many described being thankful to work with colleagues they treasured and who had informally mentored them. A few also shared that after having spent ten or more years in their district, a formal mentor program had in fact now been instituted, and they were happily mentoring new teachers.

Furthermore, it is not out of the realm of possibility that legislation would be passed requiring all teachers to get specialized training to work with at-risk student populations. Currently the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (2019) requires renewal credits in the areas of: Positive Behavior Interventions, Reading Preparation, Mental Illness Awareness, Suicide Prevention Strategies, English Learners Best Practices, and Cultural Competency Training. In addition to those already listed, as education legislation evolves, training hours could be added surrounding trauma and how this relates to at-risk populations. This legislation would be beneficial as students that have faced traumatic incidents are present in all educational settings.

Essentially, the significance of the information discovered in this investigation could have a statewide positive impact on the at-risk student population. Once induction and mentor programs have been established and developed in K- 12 school districts additional changes in individual school sites could improve professional satisfaction. Namely, honoring a teacher's licensed discipline area and professional training when assigning teaching schedules.

Moreover, my final recommendation has implications for administrators and teachers in SAAPs or for that matter, individuals in any educational institution. While relationships are key, the ability or permission to be creative and provide opportunities to have a sense of ownership is imperative for professional satisfaction. When the administrator and teachers were asked why they remain working in the alternative setting, my analysis revealed the following common pieces; relationships, flexibility, creativity and freedom reverberated throughout the narratives. My interviewee's words kept surfacing. I heard, "I don't want to leave this place . . . I'd lose that relationship with my students and with my teachers, and I just want that." Also, "I wired this building, we built our first router and server, and you know we were doing all sorts of stuff and that kind of ownership, freedom and ability to be creative . . . that was really appealing to me."

What's more, administrators as well as teachers brought the MAAP organization to the surface and the importance of this organization, the people and the connections. Professional organizations dedicated specifically to alternatives fill needs that other organizations cannot meet. This research should propel MAAP forward to continue on with their legislative platform and the advancement of alternative education. The results

of my data analysis also resulted in several recommendations regarding the need for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

With the completion of this study future research opportunities abound. This initial study could be expanded to include more teachers and more administrators in SAAPs. The expansion of participants could build upon the narratives and incorporate additional quantitative data. A limitation of this research was the small sample size (seven participants). Increasing the sample size and incorporating quantitative data, would give the research more reliability and validity. Additionally, Contract Alternatives and Area Learning Programs (ALPs), two of the three types of SAAPs, could be researched and their aggregated data could be compared to the current data analysis to discern further reasons of professional satisfaction. More research with a robust sample size has the potential to raise the awareness of educational alternatives to traditional schooling and fill the existing literature gap.

This study could also be used as a foundation for future research in other states where SAAPs are present. By expanding the research to numerous states, the researcher could identify and establish trends in teacher attrition, uncover and avoid potential problems in teacher retention, essentially discovering if professional satisfaction was unique to states or regions or similar across the continual United States.

Moreover, this research could be enlarged to include educators working at a SAAP as well as educators in a traditional system. By including educators for both systems, the researcher would be able to corroborate or refute the information stated in

this initial research. Do educators in any system find professional satisfaction when they build relationships, have choice, freedom, flexibility and ownership? This chapter will end with a description of insights gained during the dissertation process with the goal of supporting future researchers.

Lessons Learned as a Researcher

It would also be remiss if Chapter Five did not contain a reflection on major lessons learned as a researcher resulting from the completion of the dissertation. The research design included developing a survey and interview questions that were piloted by two teachers. Following the pilot test and a successful dissertation proposal meeting the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was written and turned in. Once IRB approved the application the interviews could begin. However, I quickly discovered that some of my interview questions only worked when interviewing teachers and were not a good fit for administrators.

This realization required an amendment to the IRB proposal and a delay as I waited for the approval to move forward. As a novice researcher, I had underestimated the importance of and time commitment required for a successful IRB application. I also should have fully piloted my survey and interview questions and included two administrators. Having successfully completed the IRB process it is now clear that it does not always go smoothly. If the pilot process had been complete, the amendment to the IRB could have been avoided and the research could have begun sooner. Another important insight was connected to using qualitative interviews.

Being new to interviewing, having only practiced the skills needed with classmates and acquaintances, I suddenly realized my limited exposure to the craft. Added to this challenge was the small alternative community I was enmeshed in and the strength of my relationships with those in the community. Again, as a novice researcher, I undoubtedly underestimated what would be required in conducting a successful interview.

For example, my lengthy history in alternative education and my close relationships with the participants made it difficult to remain an impartial interviewer. Essentially, three issues surfaced as an interviewer. The first issue was forcing myself to not lead the interviewee in a certain direction, but to stay focused on being a listener. A second issue was reminding myself the purpose was to hear the participants describe their lived experience and not to engage in conservation; reminiscing with them. Third, given my relationship with the participants outside of the research setting the participants kept checking to see that they were giving me the answers desired, making it necessary as a researcher to reassure them that there were no correct answers, I was looking for their narratives, their lived experiences.

Furthermore, an extension of the interview deficiencies there was a significant lesson learned as an inexperienced qualitative researcher; I was not proficient at transcription and did not enjoy it. The original thought was that by personally transcribing the interviews it would provide observable newauances in each interview. The transcription roadblock began immediately with only half of the first interview successfully completed. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the interview recording

stayed untouched for months. Once a professional transcriptionist was hired, the interviews were fully transcribed and the visibility of individual nuances was still possible. Hiring out the transcription work provided the avenue necessary to get past my personal roadblock. When conducting future qualitative research studies, this researcher would not hesitate to immediately hire a professional transcriptionist. As an educational practitioner involved in research the ability to recognize when outside help was needed was perhaps one of the largest takeaways.

In short, growth as a researcher included perseverance through the IRB process, developing research skills, crafting interview questions, increasing confidence and skills as an interviewer, finding work-life balance and the navigation of a global pandemic.

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Appendix A

Minnesota Statute 124D.68 Subdivision 3 states:

> Eligible pupils. (a) A pupil under the age of 21 or who meets the requirements of
> section 120A.20, subdivision 1, paragraph (c), is eligible to participate in the
> graduation incentives program, if the pupil:

(1) performs substantially below the performance level for pupils of the same age in a locally determined achievement test;

(2) is behind in satisfactorily completing coursework or obtaining credits for graduation;

(3) is pregnant or is a parent;

(4) has been assessed as chemically dependent;

(5) has been excluded or expelled according to sections 121A.40 to 121A.56;

(6) has been referred by a school district for enrollment in an eligible program or a program pursuant to section 124D.69;

(7) is a victim of physical or sexual abuse;

(8) has experienced mental health problems;

(9) has experienced homelessness sometime within six months before requesting a transfer to an eligible program;

(10) speaks English as a second language or is an English learner; or

(11) has withdrawn from school or has been chronically truant; or

(12) is being treated in a hospital in the seven-county metropolitan area for cancer or other life threatening illness or is the sibling of an eligible pupil who is being currently treated, and resides with the pupil's family at least 60 miles beyond the outside boundary of the seven-county metropolitan area (Graduation Incentives Program, 2017).

Appendix B

Minnesota Statute 124D.128 requires Continual Learning Plans (CLPs):

A district, charter school, or state-approved alternative program must inform all pupils and their parents about the learning year program and that participation in the program is optional. A continual learning plan must be developed at least annually for each pupil with the participation of the pupil, parent or guardian, teachers, and other staff; each participant must sign and date the plan. The plan must specify the learning experiences that must occur during the entire fiscal year and are necessary for grade progression or, for secondary students, graduation. The plan must include:

(1) the pupil's learning objectives and experiences, including courses or credits the pupil plans to complete each year and, for a secondary pupil, the graduation requirements the student must complete;

(2) the assessment measurements used to evaluate a pupil's objectives;

(3) requirements for grade level or other appropriate progression; and

(4) for pupils generating more than one average daily membership in a given grade, an indication of which objectives were unmet.

The plan may be modified to conform to district schedule changes. The district may not modify the plan if the modification would result in delaying the student's time of graduation. (Learning Year Program To Provide Instruction Throughout Year, 2017).

Appendix C

Minnesota statute 124D.128 Subdivision 6 states:

Subd. 6. Revenue computation and reporting.

Aid and levy revenue computations must be based on the total number of hours of education programs for pupils in average daily membership for each fiscal year. Average daily membership shall be computed under section 126C.05, subdivision 15. Hours of participation that occur after the close of the regular instructional year and before July 1 must be attributed to the following fiscal year. For revenue computation purposes, the learning year program shall generate revenue based on the formulas for the fiscal year in which the services are provided. The dates a participating pupil is promoted must be reported in a timely manner to the department.

Appendix D

Please respond to the survey questions below. Click on the circle beside your answer.

Each question can only have one answer in Part One.

Part One:

1. Which term best describes the school you work at? Rural (school is located in a small town/country) Urban (school is located in the city)

2. Which term best describes your position at this school? a. regular classroom teacher b. administrator c. Other

3. What grade level do you teach? Select all that apply. a. 9   b.10   c. 11   d. 12   e. Other

4. What is your total number of years teaching experience? a. 0 to 5 b. 6 to 10 c. 11 to 15 d. 16 to 20 e. 21 to 25 f. 26+

5. What is your highest degree earned? a. Bachelor's b. Master's c. Doctorate

6. Are you a National Board Certified teacher? a. Yes b. No

7. Which term best describes you?

a. Traditional Education Graduate

b. Lateral Entry Graduate

Pursuing License

8. Which subject area(s) do you teach? Select all that apply. a. Art b. Auto Tech c. Band d. Business e. Carpentry f. Chorus g. Computers h. Dance i. Drafting j. Drama/Theatre k. English l. ESL/ELL m. Family Consumer Science n. Foreign Language o. Graphics p.

Guidance q. Health Science r. JROTC s. Mathematics t.Media Specialists u. Physical

Education v. Science

w. Social Studies x. Special Education y. Technology z. Woodworking Other

_____

Part two: Please respond to the following open-ended questions.

10. List 3 characteristics of successful teachers in High Need High Schools. (Rank in

order of importance.)

11. List 3 characteristics of successful administrators in High Need High Schools. (Rank

in order of importance.)

12. In what ways could (teacher preparation programs) (i.e. colleges, universities,

community colleges) prepare beginning teachers to teach in High Need High Schools?

13. List 3 ways new or experienced teachers could be attracted to High Need High

Schools. (Rank in order of importance.)

14. List 2 strategies that principals could employ to retain Initially Licensed Teachers in

High Need High Schools.

15. List 3 ways highly qualified teachers could be retained in High Need High Schools.

(Rank in order of importance.)

16.   List 3 strategies that highly qualified teachers in High Need High Schools use to

improve student achievement. (Rank in order of importance.)

17. How many years have you been at this particular school?

18. Do you plan to stay at your current school for at least another 5 years? Why or why

not? (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012)

Appendix E

Dissertation Qualitative Survey

Fixed Format Section

Directions: For questions 1-7 select the one response that best describes you in relation to the statement. For questions 8-10 please provide a short answer.

1. Select the response that best describes the type of school where you work.

    a. Area Learning Center (ALC)

    b. Alternative Learning Program (ALP)

    c. Traditional Public School

    d. Contract Alternative

    e. Other

2. Select the response that best describes the total number of years work at this school.

    a. Less than 7 years

    b. Between 7 and 10 years

    c. Between 11 and 14 years

    d. More than 15 years

3. Select the response that best describes your reason for working at this school

    a. My preference was to work at a SAAP and I was offered the job.

    b. My preference was not to work at a SAAP but this was my only job offer.

    c. My preference was not to work at a SAAP but I was assigned to work here by my district.

    d. Other:

4. Select the response that best describes your experience with having a mentor.

    a. I was provided with a mentor my first year of working.

    b. I was not provided with a mentor my first year of working at the SAAP.

    c. A mentor was assigned my first year of working but I had no opportunity to work with them.

    d. A mentor was assigned my first year of working and we worked together on multiple occasions.

    e. Other

5. Select the response that best describes your experience with an induction program at your SAAP.

    a. My first year of working I participated in a formal induction program.

    b. My first year of working there was a formal induction program but I had no opportunity to participate.

    c. My first year of working there was no formal induction program but staff/teachers informally helped me learn the ropes.

    d. Other

6. Select the response that best describes your experience as a mentor.

    a. I have volunteered to serve as a mentor to new hires at my SAAP but none have been assigned or there have been no new hires.

    b. I have volunteered to serve as a mentor to new hires at my SAAP and at least one has been assigned.

    c. I was assigned to mentor a new hire at my SAAP.

    d. Other

7. Would you support legislation that required some of your continuing education credits (CEUs) to be directly related to working at-risk students?

    a. Yes

    b. No

    c. Maybe

    d. Other

8. Please list the courses you are currently teaching or the courses you taught the year you retired. Also note if any of these are outside of the area you are licensed in. If not teaching, respond NA.

9. Based on your experience working at an SAAP please describe the two most important characteristics of a teacher whose students make progress towards graduation. Feel free to add or describe more than two.

10. If you participated in an induction program when you first began working at a SAAP describe your reaction to it and the relevance of the information it contained for your job. (Modified from Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012)

Appendix F

Dissertation Interview Questions

Directions: This interview is about learning from you - hearing your story about the lived experience of teaching at an ALC. There are no right or wrong answers, just descriptions of your experience. I want to remind you that this interview will be audio recorded and we will be finished within 45 minutes.

1. I am interested in learning about the journey that led you into education. Things you could talk about would be: Was being a teacher/administrator something you always wanted to do or did you make the decision in college or at some other time, or was there some other reason? Help me understand your journey to here - working at a SAAP.

Potential Prompts:

- I heard you entered teaching because [fill in something from their story]. I would like to hear more of your story and teaching at a SAAP. [re-direct]

2. You have been teaching/administrating at a SAAP for over . . . years. I am interested in learning more about your pre-service program and its impact on preparing you to work at a SAAP.

Potential Prompts:

- Were there specific courses or experiences that helped you be ready to teach at a SAAP?

- Looking back, are there experiences you would have liked your university program to have provided you.

3. What elements are present in your school that meet your needs so that you remain there?

4. What ways do you think new teachers working with at-risk students could be supported as they begin working with at-risk students at a SAAP?

5. What are pieces of support an administrator could provide to their teaching staff to ensure they remain teaching in a SAAP?

6. Having worked at a SAAP for over . . . years. Help me understand how you would recruit teachers to work at a SAAP ?

Potential Prompts:

-   Are there ways you are aware of that help in the recruitment of new teachers, what would you suggest?

7. I would love to hear about when you first began working at a SAAP and if anyone formally or informally mentored you.

8. I am interested in learning about why you stay working at this SAAP? Again, with all your experience and knowledge, how do you think SAAPs can retain teachers? (Modified from Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012)

We are at the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Thank them

Ask if they want to see the transcript