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*East Tennessee State University*

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The Impact of Dismissal of Non-tenured  
Teachers on Principals in Tennessee

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A dissertation  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by  
David W. Messer  
December 2001

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Dr. Russ West, Chair  
Dr. Nancy Dishner  
Dr. Ron Lindahl  
Dr. Elizabeth Ralston

Keywords: Tenure, Non-tenure, Dismissal, Ethical decisions,  
Teacher evaluation, Teacher shortage, Principal's attitude

## ABSTRACT

### The Impact of Dismissal of Non-tenured Teachers on Principals in Tennessee

by

David W. Messer

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues that principals face in making the decision or recommendation to bring about the involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers. I was concerned with identifying the emotions, feelings, conflicts, and misgivings that principals experience during this process. Related concerns were identified. They included the issues of principals using professionally ethical ways to encourage or coach teachers to resign prior to dismissal, dealing with "lame duck" teachers between notification and the end of the school year, and writing positive letters of recommendation for teachers they have decided not to renew. These questions were addressed through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 18 principals from the state of Tennessee who had made recommendations to involuntarily separate non-tenured teachers from their school systems.

Several themes emerged from the data and the following conclusions were reached: (1) teachers were not recommended for renewal primarily as a result of concerns about discipline, inappropriate behavior, and professionalism; (2) principals were generally able to frame their decisions in context with their vision for the school; (3) directors of school systems were generally supportive of principals making personnel decisions; (4) personnel decisions frequently involved political considerations; (5) these decisions caused stress, anxiety, and emotional concerns for the principals; (6) the state model for teacher evaluation was generally considered as being inconsequential while making personnel decisions; (7) few problems were encountered from "lame duck" teachers; (8) principals frequently encouraged teachers to resign prior to taking formal action to not renew them; (9) positive or benign letters of recommendation were frequently written for teachers who were not rehired; (10) a shortage of teachers has resulted in the hiring of non-renewed teachers by other school systems.

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## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family (Candy, Jeremy, Julie, and Joe) who have inspired, encouraged, supported, and even prodded me along as I have worked to complete this project, perhaps without even being aware of it.

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I am extremely appreciative of the suggestions and oversight provided by my peer debriefer, Susan Eilers. My auditor, Carol McCullough, has diligently read and examined my notes, drafts, and transcriptions. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Mike Dalton, Director of Schools in the Maryville City School System. He has been exceptionally understanding during the duration of the doctoral program. Finally, I would like to thank the administrators who were interviewed. They graciously gave their valuable time as I participated in this endeavor. More importantly, I think they freely shared their feelings, doubts, and even misgivings about this subject.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

He told the secretary to hold his calls and then closed his door. He needed some time to himself. He had just finished telling the second year math teacher that she would not be rehired. He had rehearsed the message, and he had done it before.

"As you know, the first three years are on a year-by-year basis. The school system will fulfill its contractual obligation through this year, and we expect you to do the same. After this year, you will not be employed by the school system. You will not be rehired for next year. On or before April 15, you will receive a letter to that effect, unless, of course, you choose to resign your position." She would resign. He knew that. He was glad it was over, but he wondered if it really was.

He had expected the anger.

"You can't do that. It's not fair. How can you do that to me?"

He had expected the hurt feelings.

"I thought that you liked me. You hired me."

He never expected the surprise and denial.

"How can you do that? You never told me anything I was doing was wrong."

He had told her time and time again. It was documented. All of the evidence was there -- the evaluations, the conferences, the letters, the parent complaints, the growth plans, but she was still surprised. He wondered where, when, and why it did not work out. What could he have done differently?

He had high expectations when she was hired. She was confident, articulate, and poised. Her academic record was good. She had glowing recommendations from her student teaching supervisor. The math department chair took to her immediately and wanted her hired. She even volunteered to sponsor the junior varsity cheerleaders. Everything was there. Now, two years later, his only concern was how he was going to keep a lid on it for two months until school was out for the year. Math teachers are getting hard to find, and he was firing one who two years ago seemed to have it all. He was firing a 26-year-old math teacher with Chron's disease and a disabled husband.

Each year superintendents and directors of schools ask principals to make recommendations that may lead to the dismissal or non-renewal of teachers. Surprisingly, few of these decisions result in procedural hearings or litigation. Those that do are costly. The average cost to school systems that dismiss a tenured teacher has been reported to be as high as \$500,000 (Jones, 1997). Research studies (Ward, 1995) indicate that few involuntary separations actually take place after tenure has been granted.

Most principals are familiar with fair dismissal and tenure laws. They have received training in how to work with marginal teachers. They know the importance of careful documentation. They know what to say and what not to say. Not very many involuntary separations result in litigation, but most are contentious and sensitive. All arouse emotions. All require ethical, careful, thoughtful, insightful, and reflective decision-making.

### Statement of the Problem

Several recent developments have increased the attention given to teacher hiring and retention. The President of the United States and the National Education Association have declared on multiple occasions that a major teacher shortage is looming. The issue of hiring, developing, and keeping the best teachers possible has emerged as a national concern. The performance of each teacher is being held to a higher standard than ever before at the precise time that fewer college graduates, even though they are qualified, enter the profession and more experienced teachers leave it (NCES, 1998). In January 2000, the state of Tennessee joined the ranks of states that require extensive background checks for prospective teachers (Southern Regional Education Board, 1998). This state has also raised the accountability stakes through "value added assessment" and end-of-course testing. This information finds its way to published school and system report cards. Principals are being called upon to make decisions about the continuation of employment of people for whom replacements or improvements might not be readily available.

### Purpose of the Study

In this study, I examined the issues that principals face, and deal with, in making the decision or recommendation to bring about the involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers. What are the emotions, feelings, conflicts, and misgivings that principals experience knowing that their decisions are life altering to the teacher and critically important for the school? Do principals believe that there are professionally ethical ways

to encourage or coach teachers to resign prior to dismissal to avoid a blemished personnel record? How do principals deal with "lame duck" teachers between notification and the end of the school year? Why do principals write positive letters of recommendation for teachers they have decided not to renew? What are the ethos and pathos involved in teacher dismissal? These questions were addressed through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 18 principals in the state of Tennessee who had previously made recommendations that non-tenured teachers were to be involuntarily separated from their school systems.

### Significance of the Study

It is not surprising that little information exists about the involuntary separation, or non-renewal, of non-tenured teachers. After contacting the National Education Association (personal e-mail communication, January 31, 2000), examining data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1995), and talking with representatives from three surrounding school systems, I found it impossible to gather significant data regarding the number of teachers who have been involuntarily separated from their positions. Likewise, little quantifiable data exist regarding the reasons for that action. However, the research department of the American Federation of Teachers (1996) has compiled a limited report based on responses from state and local union staff members. Principals are often disinclined to disclose or discuss issues of this nature. Additionally, given the fact that the involuntary separation of a tenured teacher is difficult, thoughtful administrators are increasingly reluctant to recommend the renewal of non-tenured teachers who are marginal or even questionable. This decision is often emotionally

charged for all of the parties involved. This study comes at a critical time for both teachers and administrators, and it may contribute to the understanding of the impact of involuntary separation.

### Limitations of the Study

In-depth interviews were used to gather most pertinent data. The participants in these conferences were solicited from a pool of respondents from the eastern part of the state of Tennessee who returned questionnaires indicating that they had dealt with the issue of involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers and who, equally importantly, were willing to talk about their feelings and experiences. Principals have been conditioned to avoid discussing personnel issues. Because I felt that some might be reluctant to discuss the ethical and emotional issues that the action elicits, all respondents were assured that confidentiality would be maintained

### Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 includes the following: (a) an introduction, (b) the statement of the problem, (c) the purpose of the study, (d) the significance of the study, (e) the delimitations and limitations of the study, and (f) an overview of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature that is pertinent to the study. It includes the observations, findings, and opinions of authorities. Additionally, it includes references to previously collected statistical and demographic data that relate to the topics of teacher dismissal, movement, and shortage. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this

study. It includes a description of the following: (a) the target population and sample for the initial survey, (b) the method of identifying interviewees from the list of initial respondents, (c) the data collection instruments used, (d) the research plan and design that was followed, and (e) the methods used to analyze the data. Chapter 4 presents findings from the study. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings and conclusions. It also includes suggestions or recommendations for further study and practice that were identified from this research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to present a review of the literature relevant to the topic of teacher tenure and dismissal or involuntary separation. It includes the observations, findings, and opinions of authorities. Additionally, it includes references to previously collected statistical and demographic data that relate to the topic.

The first section deals with the issue of ethics in school administration. Various descriptions and indications of ethical leadership are presented. Emphasis is placed on the importance of ethical decision-making by the school administrator, primarily in the area of personnel actions.

The next section deals with the issue of teacher tenure. Attention is given to the constant attacks on tenure by politicians and others interested in educational reform. This section focuses on the highly publicized “incompetent teacher” problem that many people seem to perceive. The accompanying issue of teacher accountability is included in this review.

The third section deals with the issue of an existing or pending teacher shortage. Professional organizations report that teachers are, in increasing numbers, leaving the profession due to dissatisfaction or retirement. Additionally, universities report that fewer graduates are assuming teaching positions despite being trained through traditional teacher preparation programs.



The fourth section is concerned with matters of collegiality, culture, and climate that might have an impact on, or that might be impacted by, personnel decisions, which result in termination or non-renewal. Finally, a summary of the literature review is presented.

### Ethics and School Administration

Every day, educational administrators, and especially principals, make decisions that have an impact on the moral and ethical nature of their schools. Additionally, these decisions reflect on their own morality and ethics. Calabrese (1988) maintained that ethical leadership is the moral component of instructional leadership -- a role principals are expected to fulfill. Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1998) asserted that responsible behavior and ethical behavior on the part of school administrators are synonymous concepts. They also maintained that educational leaders must develop the ability and capacity to consistently reflect about the ethics of their actions and decisions. The number and variety of actions and decisions made by school administrators in the course of one day is staggering. Although some of those might not appear to have ethical implications at all, I believe that school administrators are dealing with an increasing number of issues that require ethical reflection. I also believe that some of those decisions result in principals weighing, considering, and perhaps even choosing courses of action that might be expedient, expected, or even mandated but which are morally and ethically questionable (Nash, 1996).

MacDonald described morality and moral decision-making as the doing of good rather than harm (1995). He also suggested that morality was all about deciding on the

best course of action in all situations. The best course of action for a school administrator is not necessarily the easiest, nor does it always avoid doing harm. McDonald (1995) said that an individual's ethical resources had to be called upon to recognize and identify morally important issues in each alternate course of action being considered. He concluded by saying that leaders should never make decisions that cause harm to anyone for whom the leader has an obligation as a professional or as a human being. The decisions and dilemmas being faced by school administrators cannot be resolved that easily.

Personnel decisions are clearly among the most complicated and complex ethical matters that educational administrators face. To whom is harm being done? Is it moral to keep an incompetent teacher and thus avoid harming him or her, while continuing to allow students to be harmed by his or her presence?

### Ethical Decisions Involving Personnel

Teacher evaluation and assessment is one primary area where individual administrator ethics come into play. Seldin (1988) wrote that whenever, and for whatever purpose, teachers are being evaluated, the principal must show consistent and appropriate ethical behavior. Implicit in that statement is the underlying assumption that the retention or the dismissal of the teacher is based on the administrator's objective assessment of his or her performance. In such cases, the issue clearly becomes one that involves the honesty and ethics of the evaluator as well as the integrity of the evaluative instrument and process. For example, Bok (1999) described a situation involving the evaluative reports issued for officer promotion by the United States Army. He pointed out that the

raters knew that when they were asked to rate officers as superior, excellent, outstanding, effective, marginal, or inadequate, the ones that were rated as anything below excellent were not considered worthy of advancement. It was not enough to the United States Army to be outstanding or even effective. Thus, the ethical framework for the raters was established by common practice and by their general understanding of the process. The same scenario might well exist among educational administrators who score teachers on various scales. What is average to one person might be totally unacceptable to another, yet both are using the same scale. To some administrators, the ethical way to approach teacher evaluations to avoid doing harm might be to use only superlatives. To others, the ethical issue might become the treatment of, and reflection on, those truly exceptional teachers whose scores are mitigated by the inflated scores of others.

Castetter (1971) stated that many agree that teacher appraisals are, more often than not, based more on the personality of the individual rather than on how effective she or he is as a teacher. He added that it is believed by many that appraisal tools lack validity, that raters have obvious biases, and that most appraisals are unjust if used as a basis for dismissal.

Pappano (2001) reported that as accountability and teacher quality have become major areas of focus, teacher evaluation itself has been subject to scrutiny. Educators and the lay public seem to have different ideas about what it is supposed to accomplish. Parents tend to view the evaluation process as a way of weeding out inferior teachers. Principals recognize that tenure laws make getting rid of problem teachers extremely difficult. According to Pappano, principals view extensive personal counseling, not the written report as a more effective way of either improving teacher performance or removing a bad teacher from the profession. She quoted one principal as saying that these

sessions were “agonizing,” and that there were “ugly accusations, denial, anger, and frustration” (p. 5).

Although the ethical and moral use of teacher evaluation remains a significant concern, it is the issue of dismissal, or involuntary separation, that is the most difficult and contentious one facing school administrators.

Duke and Canady (1991) recognized the complicated nature of teacher dismissal. They quoted from a study in New York State that indicated no uniform or useful standard of behavior, performance, or conduct had been found to explain causes for dismissal. Implicit in these findings is the fact that the individual judgement of the administrator, operating within his or her own moral and ethical framework, is an extremely significant factor in this extremely important decision-making process. Pratt (1996) acknowledged that decisions about retention and dismissal have tremendous potential for organizational, as well as personal, tension and conflict. However, he maintained that the building principal needed to accept the personal responsibility for making those decisions and that failure to do so was, in fact, immoral. He described the role of the principal as involving multiple and layered responsibilities. The principal must assume as many roles and make as many decisions as the environment demands. Some of those create conflict. To him or her, the decision to dismiss the teacher sometimes has to be made, and the result is naturally harmful to that person. The ethical component comes into play primarily in the way the action is conducted. The teacher to be dismissed must be treated with as much dignity as the situation allows. Pratt further suggested that this consideration, more than the adverse action itself and more than attention to legal detail, would prevent challenges and litigation. Such cannot always be the case. Even when the decision to dismiss a teacher has been made within the appropriate ethical and moral framework, the issue can

be fraught with complications. These complications include the emotional responses of different people involved, the existence of tenure laws and union agreements, and the threat of litigation. An understanding of the formal and informal considerations that accompany the dismissal process is essential. The following brief historical overview presents some of those considerations.

### A History of Tenure

The National Education Association created a committee in 1884 to study the issue of tenure. Reis (1999) stated that this study probably came about as a result of the passage of the Civil Service Act in 1883. This national legislation was intended to address the abuse of political power in government and its resultant effect on employee quality and turnover. The Massachusetts State Legislature passed the first statewide teacher tenure law in 1886 (Watson, 1994). As in the case of civil service laws, tenure laws were intended to protect teachers from arbitrary or capricious dismissals by school boards that might be motivated by political patronage or favoritism. Bridges (1984) stated that firing a teacher should be a difficult thing to do because prior to tenure laws, teachers were subject to being fired by local school boards for a variety of reasons unrelated to performance. These included school board members' desire to create positions for friends, supporters, and family. Ellis (1984) acknowledged that although the need for such laws existed, they were in no way intended to prevent, only to regulate, the dismissal of incompetent, ineffective, or inappropriate teachers. The protection of tenure was intended to address possible political reprisals and not instructional incompetence.

LaRue (1996) prepared a summary of the tenure laws from all states. Generally, these codes stipulate that a teacher must serve a three-year probationary period before tenure is granted. Indiana and Missouri are exceptions. In those states, a five-year period is required. In the state of Tennessee, a period of three years, or not less than 27 months within a five-year period, is called for (Tennessee Education Laws Annotated, 1998).

No state unconditionally prohibits the dismissal of tenured teachers. Camp, Underwood, Connelly, and Lane (1993) listed incompetence, immorality, inefficiency, neglect of duty, unprofessional conduct, and insubordination as legal reasons for dismissal in most states. Despite these provisions, many people seem to have the impression that tenure offers permanent job security. Judging from the low number of tenured teachers who are dismissed, apparently among these people are principals. Ward (1995) cited a study that indicated employment status (tenure) did, in fact, affect the likelihood of teacher dismissal. He said that probationary teachers were dismissed at a much higher rate than their tenured counterparts. In sample districts, non-tenured teachers accounted for 21% of the total number of teachers, and they accounted for 81% of the involuntary separations. He maintained that the existence of tenure accounted for the huge difference. Focusing on the issue of cause of dismissal, he asserted that a larger proportion of non-tenured teachers were dismissed due to incompetence than were tenured teachers for the same reason. The difference was not explained in terms of documented teacher evaluation differences, but rather in terms of the principals desiring to avoid dealing with the greater burden of proof necessary to develop a case involving tenured teachers. This condition helps explain why the issue of teacher competence or incompetence has become the focal point in the growing controversy about tenure. The perception is present in the American public that the teaching profession is filled with

incompetent teachers who are operating freely and totally protected by antiquated tenure laws. In *The Maryville-Alcoa Daily Times*, the Associated Press (2000) reported that a poll conducted in the State of Tennessee indicated that 60% of respondents opposed tenure in Tennessee's public schools.

### Tenure and Incompetence

The national media has supported the idea that Americans have become increasingly alarmed by decreasing teacher quality and that they (the American public) were tired of those teachers being protected by unions and tenure laws. Bridges (1984) said that incompetence within the teaching profession had become a major issue for both parents and administrators. Polaneczky, quoted in *School Reform News* (1997), said that lazy, "rotten" (p. 1) teachers were able to stay in their positions untouched for years despite being known to be abusive or incompetent. Walters (1996) reported that stories about incompetent teachers haunted communities everywhere. Colvin (1995) stated that politicians in many states had reached the point of total frustration because bad teachers thwarted their efforts at educational reform. Chapman (1998) went so far as to claim that the number of bad teachers ranged from 5% to 18% of the 2.6 million teachers in the nation. His actual numbers range from 135,000 to 468,000. Ellis (1984) wrote that 45% of the surveyed parents who had children in public schools said that there were some terrible teachers in their local systems who needed to be fired.

Tenure laws are increasingly coming under attack. Oregon became the first state to abolish tenure statewide. That state adopted the concept of a two-year contract instead (Bradley, 1999). The governor of Georgia has called for an end to tenure (Cumming,

2000), and similar sentiments have been expressed by politicians and governmental leaders in Florida, Alabama, Massachusetts, and California. It is apparent that a number of Americans feel that teacher incompetence is a major national concern and that the existence of tenure laws has perpetuated that condition.

Not everyone agrees that tenure laws protect incompetent teachers. Teachers who have tenure can be disciplined in a variety of ways ranging from reprimand to termination. James Fuller, an attorney who represents teachers in dismissal cases, was quoted by UPI (1983) as saying that he did not think that it was particularly hard to fire a truly bad teacher. He attributed the problem and perception to principals who he described as being too lazy or too ineffective to know how to help teachers improve. Schwartz (1997) seemed to agree. Like Fuller, he attributed the problem to principals who lack the ability or the desire to deal with instructional problems created by sub-par teachers.

Faced with these conflicting views and with the fact that inevitably the problem focuses on them, principals regularly have to make decisions about rehiring or involuntarily separating teachers -- tenured and non-tenured. Although it is difficult to get an accurate idea of the total number of dismissals, an AFT report (1996) indicated that over a three-year period there were 136 formal dismissals for incompetence reported from a survey drawn principally from New York and Illinois. Bradley (1999) quoted a study of 30 North Carolina systems that had a total of 12,297 teachers. In a three-year period, there were a total of 40 dismissals of tenured teachers. VanSciver (1990) cited a Delaware study that showed that during the 1989-1990 school year there were 5,850 teachers employed, and only four tenured teachers were dismissed. He stated that in many states the rate of dismissal was essentially zero. The dismissal, involuntary



separation, or firing of tenured teachers simply is not taking place. Politicians and the American public claim to know bad teachers are out there. So why not just fire them?

Perhaps the situation is not really as bad as many seem to think. However, to some, it might be difficult to state that the incompetence issue is overblown. Ratnesar (1998) reported that in Massachusetts, 60% of the state's aspiring teachers failed to pass the certification test. He continued by saying that nearly one-third of Virginia's aspiring teachers failed a basic skills test. A school system in New York reported that 75% of its employed teaching staff failed an eleventh grade reading comprehension test. Cambor (1999) disagreed and maintained that an occasional bad teacher, coupled with an American public that has become increasingly convinced by misleading media reports that the nation's schools and teachers are substandard, negatively skews the broader and more formative discussion about teacher quality. Things are not as bad as most think. Bracey (1997) and others would agree.

Others suggest that the potential financial cost of dismissing tenured teachers dissuades administrators. Coakley (1991) reported that some dismissal cases could literally consume as much as half of the principal's time, last over two years, and cost nearly \$100,000. A *Chicago Tribune* newspaper account (1997) stated that the process take years, cost hundred of thousands of dollars, and is tailor-made to discourage even the best administrators from trying it. In Denver, Cummings (1998) reported that the Jefferson County School System spent \$125,000 over a three-year period to fire a tenured teacher who showed an R-rated movie in his class. Cost conscious and financially strained school systems might look cautiously at the prospect of accumulating such large costs.

There is perhaps at least one more compelling reason why the literature reveals a predominant disinclination to dismiss tenured teachers. Jones (1997) quoted one superintendent as saying that the dismissal of a tenured teacher was not just a process for the administrator -- it was a career. The firing of a teacher takes place at a high personal cost -- not only to the teacher, but also to the principal. Jones (1997) cited an example of one principal who lost the use of his arm due to the stress involved in pursuing a dismissal that resulted in litigation. Principals literally have to decide whether or not it is worth the trouble. In many cases, that question transcends legal and financial considerations. Principals realize that ultimately they may end up being the ones on trial. Jacobson (1993) quoted a principal who endured a lengthy dismissal case as saying that "firing someone is not an easy thing to do" (p. 1). In most dismissal cases, the principal is not in an enviable position. The students and parents might never learn the real reasons a teacher is being fired. Matters such as the teacher's evaluation must be treated as confidential unless the teacher decides to make them public. Principals are instructed as to what they cannot say, although the teacher has no such constraints. Whittaker (1999) acknowledged that dismissing a teacher might seem like an extremely traumatic and emotional event for a school. However, he pointed out that those emotions generally existed only during the duration of the process. He said that an ineffective teacher seldom leaves a legacy at a school. However, the legacy that is left might be an imprint on the psyche of the principal. Incompetent teachers seldom leave on their own. They are without professional options. The impetus comes from the principal. Fullan (1998) and Hirst (1980) warned that principals cannot deny, abdicate, or externalize these critical decisions. There is perhaps no other issue that has as much impact on the principal as the dismissal of a teacher.

## The Teacher Shortage

Every time a teacher is dismissed, a vacancy is created. Conversely, every teacher who has been dismissed is a potential applicant for a position in another school or school system. If the principal who was responsible for the involuntary separation has compromised his or her integrity by writing either a favorable or even a neutral letter of recommendation for that person, it is possible that the teacher will be employed elsewhere and that the legacy will continue. The likelihood of that hiring is directly tied to the emerging controversy about a teacher shortage in the United States.

The National Education Association (2000) has quoted a finding from the National Center for Education Statistics stating that over 2.4 million teachers will be needed nationwide within the next 11 years. This shortage is due to attrition, retirement, and increased student enrollment. Caliborne (1999) quoted former Education Secretary Richard Riley as saying that many schools have been hard pressed to put a "warm body" in front of the class. In so stating, he has linked the shortage issue with that of teacher competence. President Clinton promised a national plan to help hire 1,000,000 teachers in the next few years (Argetsinger, 1999). The American Federation of Teachers (1998) declared that "a teacher shortage clearly exists" (p. 1).

Other sources (Feistritzer, 1998) have maintained that the looming shortage is nothing but a myth fabricated to provide an opportunity and justification for the infusion of federal money into education. Zoroya and Hartzell (1999) claimed that the shortage simply did not add up mathematically. More importantly, like Riley, they tied the shortage issue to that of competence and to the attractiveness of particular positions and fields. Chaddock (1998) reported that in Fairfax County, Virginia, there were at least 200

applicants for every vacancy. He quoted the findings of a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Information that basically maintained that only nine states (unnamed) were suffering from a shortage so severe as to virtually guarantee every fully certified applicant with an education major a job. Feistritzer (1998) quoted Daniel Hecker of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) as saying that the BLS saw no indication of an actual or impending teacher shortage.

Merrow (1999) said that President Clinton's ominous warning about the inevitable teacher shortage had been sounded by virtually every American president since Eisenhower. Merrow suggested that the real problem was one of retention and not recruitment. In a broadcast interview (Lehrer, 1998), Secretary Riley acknowledged that little about the teaching profession encouraged people to stay in it. He described how new teachers were typically allowed to sink or swim and that they were given the most difficult classes and the most unpleasant extra-curricular responsibilities. Natt, writing for The American Association of School Administrators (1999), reported that each year 150,000 new teachers had to be hired just to replace those who left or retired. Mootz (2000) said that the average length of stay in the profession was less than five years. *Newsweek* (2000) reported that states were not doing enough to keep good teachers in the classroom. Sinatra (1999) quoted Margaret Gaston of the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning as saying that the teaching profession had to become more compelling in itself. She maintained that it could become that way through a variety of initiatives including higher salaries and higher standards.

Evidence supports the claim that attrition is a major problem and that appropriately trained teachers are not entering the profession. Mootz (2000) reported that at least 20% of certified teachers are currently doing something besides teaching.

Darling-Hammond (as cited in Natt, 1999) said that colleges of education and universities were currently producing more potential teachers than there were immediate or projected openings. Feistritz (1998) maintained that every year in this decade colleges were awarding in excess of 100,000 bachelor's degrees in education and that there were many qualified people who were simply not teaching. The National Center for Education Statistics (1998) reported that the percentage of "leavers" from teaching who left for positions outside of the profession increased from 17.0% in 1987 to 21% in 1993. NCES statistics (1998) also showed an overall increase in the percent of people who left teaching, for any reason, from 5.6% in the years 1987 to 1989 to 6.6% in the years from 1993 to 1995. That same report showed that the number of teacher respondents who indicated that they would certainly or probably be willing to choose teaching again decreased from 76.8% in 1961 to 49% in 1986. Clearly, there is an emerging disinclination to enter the teaching profession, even among those who have received professional training, and a corresponding inclination to leave the profession quickly for those who do become teachers.

The implications for the ethical school administrator are enormous. She or he is faced with the tasks of ridding the profession of incompetent, ineffective, or immoral teachers while filling those positions with better qualified individuals despite the fact that the pool of available aspirants may be shrinking. The task is further complicated by the fact that the administrator must then retain those teachers while operating within a competitive job market both inside and outside the profession.

### Mentoring, Collegiality, and Collaboration

Castetter (1971) said that the principle aim of the organization should not be to try to discover new and less painful ways of dismissing personnel, but to reduce the necessity of having to do so. Hiring the best candidates would obviously be the first step in that process. Slosson (1999) maintained that hiring teachers is the most important thing that principals do. He also said that it is the principal who is left to clean up the mess if a mistake is made. However, Hoerr (1996) stated that the demands now being placed on principals made it impossible to do the job alone, and that although the principal ultimately bears responsibility for the quality of the school, teachers must be willing and able to take on some of that responsibility and become teachers of teachers. Halford (1998) described education as the profession that eats its own young. Establishing mentoring programs within a collegial school climate would seem not only to assist principals but also to provide valuable support for new teachers. Feiman-Nemser (1996) said that mentoring of new teachers burst onto the educational scene in the early 1980s as a component of broader educational reform. She cautioned that despite the fact that mentoring seems to have a positive effect on teacher retention, it has not been shown that mentoring promotes reform-minded methods and attitudes. This is somewhat supported by Lasley (as cited in Rowley, 1999), who stated that the real value of mentors was in their ability to effectively communicate the idea that the individual is capable of transcending present challenges and of doing great things in the future. In that context, retention and not reform would seem to be the critical objective of the program. However, Newcombe (1988) stated that although mentoring programs were often created

primarily to benefit new teachers, they should, in fact, be viewed as interactive systems that benefited all of the participants.

Evans (1996) indicated his belief that school reform and improvement were embedded in an ethos of collegiality and empowerment. Sergiovanni (1996) supported that position by maintaining that schools should function more like communities than like organizations. In so doing, they rely more on norms, purposes, values, professional socialization, collegiality, and natural interdependence than on external controls. He further maintained that community members were connected to each other as a result of mutual obligations, shared traditions, and other normative ties. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) stated that collegiality was a unifying thread that held everyone in the school together. It is apparent that the decision to dismiss a teacher could impact that community and conceivably might break or loosen that thread. It is also apparent that the nature of the collegial community might impact that decision as well.

Brislin (1993) described the United States as an individualist culture. Fullan and Hargraves (1991) asserted that collegiality and individualism are not incompatible, but that most schools simply do not provide sufficient time and support for teachers to work together. They maintained that schools that were collaborative cultures were places of hard work, common commitment, and collective responsibility. That sense of shared responsibility means that the total school community is likely to become involved in the events surrounding the dismissal of a teacher. Schlechty (1990) stated that those leaders who sought to lead for change in schools needed to design changes and lead in ways that fostered collegiality. It seems likely that principals who lead in that manner might be faced with a major dilemma when they dismiss teachers simply because that action might be viewed as an admission of failure – personal and institutional. Although, at their best,

collegial, supportive school cultures might reduce the need to dismiss unsatisfactory teachers, it is also possible that the same culture might intensify the emotions, divisiveness, and polarizing effects of the action.

### Summary

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature concerning ethical decision-making by school administrators, teacher tenure, the related issues of competence and accountability, recent economic and demographic changes that have affected the pool of appropriate and available teachers, and how the dismissal of teachers might impact on, and be impacted by, the culture of the school. A review of the literature indicates that the nature of the principalship is such that moral and ethical decisions are made routinely in a variety of areas. If a given definition of moral decision-making as doing good and not harm is accepted, the dilemmas a principal faces become immediately apparent. There are complicated and complex personnel issues made daily. In this review, teacher evaluation and assessment are shown to be complex processes that involve both the integrity of the instrument and the integrity of the evaluator.

The most contentious personnel issues involve the decisions that bring about the firing, dismissal, or involuntary separation of a teacher. Tenure is shown to have originated as a way of protecting teachers from arbitrary or capricious firing due to political patronage or reprisals. The conventional wisdom has developed that tenure and teacher unions now protect incompetent teachers. As a result of that perception, tenure laws have increasingly come under attack by educators as well as politicians. Evidence is



presented that relatively few teacher dismissals actually take place, and that, indeed, very few take place involving tenured teachers.

Demographic data are presented that examine the controversy surrounding a reported impending teacher shortage. Data both supporting and undermining that claim are presented. Information is presented that seems to clearly support the position that attrition from the teaching profession is becoming significant. Evidence is also given that supports the assertion that fewer recent graduates with teaching degrees are choosing that field as a livelihood. The existence and interplay of these factors mean that the school administrator faces an increasingly complex task that cannot, and should not, be isolated from his or her personal ethics and code of moral conduct. A review of the literature indicates that the nature of the principalship is such that moral and ethical decisions are made routinely in a variety of areas. Educational change and improvement that emphasize collegiality and collaboration are shown to be both intensifier and antidote to the ills of having to dismiss teachers.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues that principals face, and deal with, in making the decision or recommendation to bring about the involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers. What are the emotions, feelings, conflicts, and misgivings that principals experience knowing that their decisions are life altering to the teacher and critically important for the school? Do principals believe that there are professionally ethical ways to encourage or coach teachers to resign prior to dismissal to avoid a blemished personnel record? How do principals deal with "lame duck" teachers between notification and the end of the school year? Do principals write positive letters of recommendation for teachers they have decided not to renew? If so, why do they do that?

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the relevant and related literature concerning ethical decision making by school administrators, teacher tenure, the related issues of competence and accountability, and recent economic and demographic changes that have affected the pool of appropriate and available teachers. The major findings of my literature review indicate that the nature of the principalship is such that moral and ethical decisions are made routinely in a variety of areas. Most significantly, there are complicated and complex personnel decisions made daily. The teacher evaluation and assessment process is complex and one that involves not only the integrity of the instrument, but also the integrity of the evaluator. By far, the most troublesome personnel issues are those that bring about the firing, dismissal, or involuntary separation of a teacher. Although tenure is shown to have originated as a way of protecting teachers from

arbitrary or capricious firing due to political patronage or reprisals, it has become the target reformers have chosen to attack. Consequently, tenure laws have increasingly come under fire by educators as well as politicians. Evidence is presented to support the claim that tenure protects bad teachers. Relatively few teacher dismissals actually take place, and very few take place involving tenured teachers.

As the demand for teacher accountability has grown, so has a controversy regarding an impending teacher shortage. Data exist both supporting and undermining the claim of such a shortage. Attrition from the teaching profession is becoming significant. Evidence also exists that supports the assertion that fewer recent graduates with teaching degrees are actually choosing to enter that field. The interaction of these factors means that the school administrator faces an increasingly complex task that cannot, and should not, be isolated from his or her personal ethics and code of moral conduct.

These issues were addressed through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with principals in the state of Tennessee who had previously made recommendations for involuntary separation. In-depth interviews were used to gather most pertinent data. The participants in these interviews were solicited from a pool of respondents in the eastern part of the state of Tennessee who returned questionnaires indicating that they have dealt with the issue of involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers and who, equally importantly, are willing to talk in detail about their feelings and experiences. The principals were asked to specifically address the previously stated questions by relating them to specific cases and courses of action.

## Research Design

This investigation included an inductive analysis of data generated by in-depth, elite interviews with principals who had the experience of making the decision to bring about the involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers. These interviews generated the thick description (Geertz, 1973) necessary to establish grounded theory, which is a major component in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model of naturalistic inquiry. This research is consistent with Gall, Borg and Gall's (1996) description of the post-positivistic methodology in that the attempt is being made to focus the investigation on the study of individual cases by making thick verbal descriptions of what is observed.

A phenomenological research paradigm was used. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) described that process as including the distinct procedures of; (a) identifying a topic that has some importance or significance, (b) determining appropriate participants, (c) conducting interviews with the selected participants, and (d) analyzing the data generated by the interview. Lincoln and Guba (1985) said that this approach relies on qualitative methodology and captures a specific picture of actual relevant human experiences. Patton (1990) said that the phenomenological approach used naturalistic inquiry in an effort to describe human experiences within a context-specific setting. In the case of this research, the specific phenomenon was involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers, and the context-specific setting involved the building level principal.

## Population and Sample

Elementary and secondary principals who had the experience of making the decision to bring about the involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers participated in this study. In order to make this population accessible to the researcher (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996), only those principals who were at schools in the eastern part of the state of Tennessee were considered. Using addresses found in the State School Directory to identify the schools in East Tennessee, I mailed questionnaires to 100 primary, elementary, and intermediate schools, 103 middle schools or junior highs, and 99 high schools. The questionnaire was mailed to the principals of the public schools listed in the State School Directory that had a zip code ranging from 37301 to 37938. These principals were asked to return a response if they met the criteria of: (a) having at some point made the decision that resulted in the involuntary separation of a non-tenured teacher and (b) being willing to discuss all aspects of the case in an in-depth interview. I received 103 completed and useable surveys. Some of the returned questionnaires were not useable because the respondents indicated that they were new to the position and had not dealt with the issue at their present school. I arranged the useable questionnaires in descending order based on how recent the last non-renewal had been and also based on the total number of such incidents the principal reported.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to select information rich cases for in-depth study. This determination was made based on the responses to questions in the questionnaire regarding the number of times they have been involved in the process and the recency of their experience(s) as described above. My attention was given to typical

cases as opposed to the intensity of the cases. The informed consent form is found in Appendix A.

### Instrumentation

The instrumentation process consisted of two phases. The first involved the development of a questionnaire to provide for the selection of candidates to be potential interviewees. The second phase of the instrumentation process consisted of the development of an interview guide. Gay (1996) suggested that the interview consist of a series of open-ended questions. Patton (1990) described three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews. These approaches are informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview. The general interview guide approach was used in this study. Patton (1990) note that the purpose of interviewing was to find out what was in and on somebody's mind and not to put something into it. The guide assisted in this effort. Lincoln and Guba (1985) agreed and added that "talk turn" was important because no data was gained while the interviewer was talking (p. 270). Although it was not designed to gather quantitative data, the questionnaire was field tested for clarity. The field test involved giving the instrument to the principals in the Maryville City School System and obtaining their reactions, questions, and concerns. They were excluded from the list of principals who received the research questionnaire. The six principals who were given the instrument reported that it was easily understood and simple to complete. A copy of the introductory letter is found in Appendix D. The questionnaire, survey form is included as Appendix B.

## Data Collection

From the pool of respondents, I identified 18 principals to contact to schedule interviews. These 18 interviews were conducted. This determination was made based on the responses to questions in the questionnaire regarding the number of times they have been involved in the process and the recency of their experience(s). My attention was given to typical cases. The selected respondents were contacted by telephone, and an interview was scheduled. Ten interviews were face-to-face, and eight were by telephone. It was my intent to maximize information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to end the interviews only when it appeared that no new information or perspective was forthcoming.

Using the interview guide, an interview was conducted. None of the interviewees objected to having the interview recorded using an audio tape recorder. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) pointed out that one advantage of using a tape recorder rather than relying on notes was that it reduced any tendency the interviewer might have to ignore or selectively record those things that might favor his or her personal biases. I transcribed the tapes and subsequently coded them for purposes of analysis. I also asked to examine and duplicate copies of any documents that might be associated with the separation process including such items as evaluations and letters of reprimand. None were presented.

## Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews and research notes were coded and entered into the NU\*DIST 4 software program. This process allowed me to look for patterns, themes, and

categories (Gay, 1996). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out, such a process allows the analysis of the data to remain in the hands of the researcher.

Particular attention was given to a cross-case analysis (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). This was used to detect similarities, differences, patterns, and themes. I then used an unordered meta-matrix (Merriam, 1988) for this purpose. The meta-matrix is included as Appendix F. This consisted of creating a chart organized by variables that are of interest to the researcher. Bits of narrative, such as key phrases or common words, were listed. Another approach was to use the constant comparison method. Glasser and Strauss (as cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985) indicated that this method contains four main stages. The first stage involved comparing incidents applicable to each category. The data were coded into as many categories as possible and categories emerged. As the number of instances of the same code appeared, I refined my ideas about the category. The coding of incidents was completed as each new incident was compared to previous incidents in the same and different groups. The second stage involved integrating categories and their properties. The third stage involved delimiting the emerging "theory" or explanations. In that stage I began to generalize from the more specific incidents identified through constant comparison. The final stage consisted of writing the emerging "theory" or explanations contained in Chapter 4.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described trustworthiness as involving those steps the researcher takes that might help convince his or her audience that the findings of the project are worthy of their attention. They also maintained that the conventional terms of "internal validity," "external validity," "reliability," and "objectivity" have their naturalistic counterparts in "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," and



"confirmability." I used the concepts of credibility and confirmability to establish trustworthiness.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), conducting the study over a prolonged period of time can increase credibility. This practice requires the researcher to invest sufficient time in each step of the project to accomplish the stated purpose. In a situation involving intensive interviews, an additional benefit will be the establishment of a trusting relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. In this study, I did make at least three contacts with each interviewee. Although perhaps not "prolonged", this sequence of three contacts can be assumed to have enhanced the quality of the final interview responses that were obtained. The initial contact was relatively brief – approximately 10 minutes. The actual interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour. The follow-up conversations were approximately as long as the first contact. Additionally, other measures used to establish credibility included the triangulation of data using responses to the questionnaire, the analyzed interviews, and data from relevant observations and notes. The study incorporated peer debriefing as a credibility measure. The peer served in the role of "devil's advocate" in questioning procedures, findings, and any apparent biases of the researcher. The peer reviewer was a middle school principal in the State of Georgia. She has had 30 years of experience and has served as a counselor, lead teacher, and high school assistant principal. Member checks were used, as the transcripts of the interviews were provided to the respondents, and they were encouraged to make changes where their ideas had not been captured correctly.

An inquiry audit was used to establish the confirmability of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented Halpern's description of an audit trail. The six elements of that trail include raw data, data that have been reduced and analyzed, reconstructed data,

process notes, personal notes of the researcher, and information regarding format, forms, surveys, etc. The researcher supplied the auditor with randomly selected tapes of interviews, corresponding transcriptions, the meta-matrix information, and copies of questionnaires completed by the participants. The auditor currently serves as Director of Gifted Programs in the Decatur City, Georgia School System. She has held a variety of administrative positions, including assistant principal and Assistant Director of Instructional Services. She also heads an independent consulting firm. A copy of the final audit is included as Appendix G.

### Summary

This study was conducted using 18 in-depth interviews with principals in the east Tennessee region. The results of the interview were analyzed through an inductive process that resulted in a rich, thick description of the impact of the decision or recommendation of principals to bring about involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers. Trustworthiness of the data was enhanced through multiple contacts with participants, peer debriefing, triangulation, member checks, and an inquiry audit.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues that principals face in making the decision or recommendation to bring about the involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers. More specifically, the study was conducted in order to ascertain the emotions, feelings, conflicts, and misgivings that principals might face in so doing. Additionally, the purpose of the study was to determine if principals felt that there were professionally ethical ways to encourage non-tenured teachers to resign prior to non-renewal. The practice of writing positive letters of recommendation for teachers who were not rehired or coached into resignation was examined. Lastly, attention was given to the potential problems associated with having a teacher who was informed of the non-renewal decision prior to April 15 remaining on the faculty until the end of the school year. This information was gained through in-depth interviews with practicing administrators, which were guided by the following research questions: what are the emotions, feelings, conflicts, and misgivings that principals experience knowing that their decisions are life altering to the teacher and critically important for the school; do principals believe that there are professionally ethical ways to encourage or coach teachers to resign prior to dismissal to avoid a blemished personnel record; how do principals deal with "lame duck" teachers between notification and the end of the school year; why do principals write positive letters of recommendation for teachers they have decided not to renew; what are the ethos and pathos involved in teacher dismissal? These questions formed the basis for the interview guide that is found in the Appendix E.

As indicated in Chapter 3, these interviews involved in-depth conversations with school administrators in eastern Tennessee. These principals had been identified by the responses to a questionnaire mailed to all principals of schools with the zip codes 37301 - 37938. Seven were administrators in middle schools, and nine were in high schools. One was in a primary school, and one was principal of a K --12 unit school. Six were characterized as being rural. Five were described as being urban. Seven were suburban in nature. Three of the administrators were female, and 15 were male. They averaged slightly over 10 years of experience in administration. They will be referred to as Principals A through R. Principal A was in his second year as principal of a rural middle school. Principal B was the administrator at a rural middle school where she had formally been a teacher. Principal C was the principal of a rural high school that was part of an independent system. Principal D was in his first year as principal of an urban middle school. He had formerly been the chief administrator in a special services center. Principal E was the principal of a rural middle school where he had spent his entire career as a teacher and administrator. Principal F was in his eleventh year at a suburban middle school. Principal G was principal of a suburban high school. She had been there for six years. Principal H was the principal of an urban high school. Principal I was in his first year as principal of an urban middle school that was located in a rapidly growing area. Principal J was the principal of a high school in a medium sized urban community that served a combination of urban and rural students. Principal K was in his twenty-third year as an administrator. He was principal at a primary school in a highly transient community heavily impacted by tourism. Principal L was the first year principal of a large comprehensive high school that served a county that is both large and diverse. Principal M was the principal of a small middle school that was one of three schools

operated by an independent system. Principal N was beginning her seventh year as principal. She was the head principal in a K – 12 unit school in a rural community. Principal O was the fifth year principal of a small high school in a prosperous suburban area. Principal P was the principal of a large comprehensive high school. His was one of two high schools serving the county. Principal Q was in his fourteenth year as principal of a medium sized high school in an area that has become a bedroom community for a larger metropolitan area. Principal R was the principal of a small rural high school. Interestingly, he reported prior to our interview that he currently had 16 teachers out of a staff of 30 who were in their first three years at the school.

In the work that follows, the major themes that emerged from the data are described. These include the fact that dismissal or nonrenewal was most commonly done because of the teacher's inability to manage his or her classroom effectively rather than as a result of instructional shortcomings; the ability of the teacher to get along with the rest of the faculty and to fit in was significant; the principals were able to relate the personnel action to elements or characteristics of their vision for their school and its culture; principals reported that the decision to not rehire non-tenured teachers was emotionally stressful; efforts by the principal to work with the teacher in improving his or her performance were largely ineffective; the state evaluation model was of little assistance and value in decision making; the act of nonrenewing the teachers in April seldom resulted in problems with that teacher for the remainder of the year; the principals indicated that it was professionally ethical to encourage teachers to resign to avoid the stigma of nonrenewal; the principals generally had no reservation about writing vague but generally positive letters of recommendation for teachers they had involuntarily separated from their schools; the principals said that the shortage of teachers often forced

them into making ill-advised hirings; and nonrenewal was seldom an obstacle to being hired in another system. The intent of the research was to develop a picture of principals who exercise their legal authority to recommend that non-tenured teachers not be rehired. To some readers they could easily be characterized as authoritarian, self-serving, and hypocritical. Other readers might view the same people as pragmatic, professional, and humanitarian. They might be seen as paragons of virtue and protectors of children and the teaching profession, or they might be viewed as being their own worst enemies.

### Vivid Memories

The principals were all able to recall in great detail, and with remarkable clarity, incidents involving non-renewal of non-tenured teachers. Although they were asked to consider primarily the most recent situations, most expanded their comments to include some discussion about other cases that had been particularly dramatic or contentious. They were able to recall specific incidents, comments, events, and even dates. As way of background, Principal D spoke at length about his experiences at a previous school -- a special services center. He said,

Because, like it or not, in the hiring process you are going to make a mistake. And my philosophy, in those cases, has always been if it is my mistake then it is my responsibility - then it is my responsibility to fix it. And so, I'd developed a mechanism to approach those kinds of issues with certificated and with non-certificated personnel. And I would expect that I have done more non-renewing, non-hiring, non-tenuring than anyone in town in recent years - probably because of that position. We would wear people out. We would have to reload with faculty the next year. Because that was the nature of the beast. So I did that for six years as principal of that environment. So I had three or four non-rehiring of certificated and non-certificated teachers, assistants, custodians, and teachers each year; and with teachers, specifically, I guess that I averaged about one in half a year. Some years having two and some years having none.

Principal C expanded his comments to include details about firing tenured teachers. Principal F talked in detail about several other personnel actions involving suspension and non-renewal. Principal E was able to quote from specific conversations with the Director of Schools. Principal N recalled specific meetings, conversations, and anecdotal notes involving an incident that had taken place three years previously. She was even able to remember that the teacher “cooled his jets” after a particular conversation. Principal O recalled specific comments students had written on pre-registration forms indicating that they “wanted to be in Mr. \_\_\_\_\_’s class – not his.” It was obvious from the conversations with the other principals that they had vivid memories of actions involving the discipline or dismissal of teachers.

#### Reasons for the Action

The most common reasons given for non-renewal were related to classroom discipline and personal behavior. The individuals who were not renewed were those who had problems with classroom management. This problem was frequently accompanied by numerous parental complaints.

Principal A described the person he failed to rehire as “a wonderful man but a poor disciplinarian.” He then added “and hence a poor teacher.” He described a walk-in observation where the students were totally inattentive, even with the principal being in the classroom. He said that the teacher seemed to be totally unaware that he was failing to get and keep their attention. He said,

I did my first observation during the first six weeks and he was teaching. If I am not mistaken, he was transferring fractions to decimals. The lesson that he taught

on the board was not a bad lesson. But the kids were...nobody was paying attention. I mean there wasn't a kid in that class paying attention to him in any way. They were writing notes. They were sleeping. This was with me in the room, which is really unusual. The lesson he was teaching, it was like nobody was there. If you'd take it with no kids there you'd say that's a good lesson, but put the kids in there. I walked around the room and watched what the kids were doing. He gave them a quiz at the end, and not one kid answered one question – not even one child -- answered one question of the quiz correctly. It was a pretty straightforward lesson. Just transforming into fractions. It wasn't anything unusually hard. We talked about it, and he didn't realize they weren't paying attention. He had no -- he took no cues from their body language, from their performance or anything. In his mind, I'm teaching it, if they don't get it, it's their problem.

This inability to receive and process cues from students and their behavior was also present in other teachers the principals did not rehire. In this case, parental complaints started in the beginning of the school year. By the end of the first semester, the principal had participated in 30 or 40 conferences about the teacher. He indicated that initially he told the parents that the teacher was young and inexperienced but that he would be working with him to improve. It became increasingly apparent that improvement was not possible. The teacher's only disciplinary tool was corporal punishment. The principal described the teacher by saying that "I have never seen a worse teacher in 25 years of education."

Principal B described a situation where a teacher was not rehired ostensibly for practicing poor personal hygiene. As she elaborated, it became clear that the issue was again discipline. She described poor teachers as those who did not possess the ability to get students to behave. She described good teachers as those who just innately can get students to "do anything they (the teacher) want." Those who were unsuccessful were just beating "their heads against the wall." She used herself as an example of an effective teacher and disciplinarian. Principal R talked about two math teachers he failed to renew



the same year. He attributed his action to problems they had with “classroom management.” He said, “I had one woman, the first or second year (he was principal). She simply had a lack of control in her class. I mean it was a zoo.”

One case involved a young man who was not renewed after his second year by his new principal – Principal D. He was a physical education teacher and was not supervising the dressing room. As a result, several students sustained minor injuries over a period of time. This same teacher dressed inappropriately. He frequently wore baggy pants with a baseball cap turned backward. The principal, from an urban middle school, reported that he also used demeaning nicknames when addressing students. He described it this way,

This person... I was told, he was very immature, that he did not supervised the dressing room when the kids getting ready to go into PE. We always had a lot of horseplay, people always getting hurt not seriously; that he did not work cooperatively with the other PE teacher; and that he was more interested in being a coach than a teacher here. He coached football in an area high school and basketball here. What I found about two weeks in the school year was that everything that I heard was true. This is his third year. He uses nicknames for students that are very demeaning particularly little sixth grade girls. I was glad that I had the opportunity to confront it at a very early time in the school year and set some limits with this teacher. We also had a situation when he left school in the middle of the day. He became ill. So a substitute was called in, and the sub arrived, and there were no lesson plans. Actually what he had done, he wanted the substitute to teach kicking a soccer ball correctly. This was an older obese lady, and what she had was a piece of paper about this size, 3x3. He had drawn a soccer shoe with the laces on there... pointing to the soccer ball... I understated that he wanted them to kick with the laces. This lady did not have a clue, but that was the extent of his lesson plans. So I called him in, this was about Labor Day, and I dealt with him on those two issues--calling students names that kids found offensive and that parents found even more offensive and being unprepared for class leaving shoddy lesson plans or even no lesson plans. We don't have a teacher dress code in (this) County, but the agreement the teachers and I made was that we would not got violate the student dress code, and he did. He would come to faculty meeting with his hat pulled down over his face dressed just like

kids. Shirt tail hanging out, baggy shorts. That was not something I addressed with him. We had already work that out at the beginning so I'll let that go.

Principal E described a teacher he failed to rehire as “one of those who wanted to be friends” more than taking care of the classroom. This teacher was experienced, and had recently moved from Texas. He added that she did not do the “paperwork” well. This school was a middle school organized with teaching teams. The principal said that the final decision to not rehire her was based more on her inability to get along with the rest of the team than any or all of her other shortcomings. He said,

We decided she was not somebody we wanted to keep, and to be honest with you, I would have given her another year, maybe even two possibly, and worked with her on areas which I considered to be weaknesses had she been able to - number 1, get along with her team members, and number 2, take some advice a little more readily and be a little more cooperative. I did not feel like we needed someone on our staff who was going to stir up trouble and be divisive.”

Another middle school administrator, Principal F, described his most recent non-renewal. This teacher was a basketball coach. In the classroom, he appeared to play favorites – his basketball players. Additionally, he had assumed an air of untouchability. He reasoned that since he was the coach, he could do as he pleased. The principal also pointed to problems with the attitude and on-court behavior of the team. The teacher became increasingly lax in performing his assignments. He was frequently late to school and failed to pick his class up from lunch on time. He described this teacher’s performance in this way,

He rolled into year three, and he teaches the same courses in seventh grade that he had the second year. (He) became lax about his assignments as far as being where he was supposed to be on time, picking up his kids at lunch, being at school on time, things like that.

According to this principal, another teacher he failed to rehire had “no classroom management skills whatsoever.” The final incident involved the teacher’s being underneath a table wrestling with a student while trying to pull him out. Principal F said,

This one had no control in the classroom. I met with him repeatedly. He would turn his back to the kids and hold his book up and write on the board, and they would throw paper wads at him. I mean it was like one of those comedies you see on TV about teaching. Then it got rough. In the spring, the kids had all they could take; he had lost his patience. I had some children come running to my office, I think it was the morning, and said come quick we’ve got a problem in this classroom. The teacher and a student are under a table fighting. I went over there and sure enough, there was a kid underneath a rectangular table and he was underneath there trying to pull the kid out. Of course it was just a big scene, and I got everybody to calm down. I met with him and told him that he didn’t need to put his hands on children.

Several of the situations described by principals involved coaches – as did the last two mentioned above. Principal G, from a high school, talked about a “hometown” person who was working as a coach. She described him as not being either a good teacher or a good coach. The decision to not rehire him was based on his inability, or unwillingness, to do what the principal asked. She said,

We had a hometown person who was working as a coach. Not a very good teacher. . .not a very good coach. This was his tenure year. I had worked with him for three years trying to make him a better teacher. He wasn't awful but incapable of what I asked him.

Principal N had a situation involving a coach as well. She said,

Some people from central office came to me inquiring about some situations that he had at some other schools. Evidently, there had been some problems or some suspicions at the previous school that there had been a relationship with a younger girl. That kind of thing. In the meantime, he was one of our assistant basketball coaches and rode the bus. I had some parents come to me with some concerns. Nothing serious had happened. Just some comments that he had made that they thought were inappropriate. It wasn’t anything major. I can’t even remember exactly what it was now. Just some sideline comments about girls. It just

compounded with that, and it was at the point I knew if he stayed at our school, it would become a huge issue because his past was going to catch up with him. In our community it would have been a major issue.

Principal P reported that he had a problem with a coach. He said,

The one that stands out most in my mind was a young lady that just was finishing her third year and was going on tenure. She was also coaching. She was assistant coach at one point, and she and the head coach came to me. They wanted to switch positions. And I agreed to do it. At that point in time I had two females and one male. At that point I told her that ‘you must understand I like the combination of one male and two females or two males and one female.’ I explained to her why I wanted that combination. I know that you can’t always get it, but that’s the combination I think is best with the girls’ team when you’re traveling. I had problems, so I agreed to make the move; and she became the head coach; and her first assistant was a male. The second assistant was a female. We went through that the next year, and the next year the guy wanted out. I had a guy on staff who had coached at the elementary level and had been an assistant boys’ coach and wanted it. I had no teaching positions. They came to me and wanted me to bring in some girl so they would all be female. The girl they wanted was a teacher at another school and my understanding, in talking to administration, was that she wanted out of it. But I had no positions, and explained that to her. I ended up putting the guy in here...made her mad...She accused me of discrimination. I told her who my attorney was and so you get yours...She wasn’t on tenure.

She was not rehired. Principal R talked about his problems with a coach. He said,

That one was a teacher/coach that I had to choose to not renew his contract. A lot of times when you have a teacher/coach different problems arise because their teaching job is related to their coaching job. Because they are hired as both. And in this case, this teacher had a lot of difficulty getting along with parents and treating kids appropriately. (He was) just rather abusive with the talk and things like that...and also abusive with parents. So we talked about it as the year went along. At the start of the school year I said that ‘you know I sat you down and said hey, you need to work on your PR with parents. You need to show your parents a little more respect and also with your kids because to remain here, you need to make sure that you work on those things.’ Unfortunately, he was not willing to do that. If anything, it got worse. So, at that point in time when it came to the end of the year, I really had no other choice as such. I had such an outcry from parents as well as school board people and things like that.

Principal K said that the teacher “made decisions that I should have been making.” He specifically mentioned that “she would discipline someone like...they couldn’t go on a field trip or something. That was her decision, but she said that they couldn’t go without checking with me.” Principal L reported that the teacher he did not renew was “having problems getting to class on time, and it was reported to me that he showed the movie ‘10’.”

Principal J seemed to be unable to clearly define his reasons for non-renewal. He said,

The last incident was an English teacher. She had taught here three years. I am not the best in the world at telling teachers how to improve. Her test scores were not very impressive. She did a good job teaching, but sometimes the students didn’t grasp the point she was trying to make. She had pretty good classroom control. No problem there. It was just a question, is or how good this teacher going to be if she receives tenure.

Most of the principals expressed concern and even bewilderment about the teachers’ inability to process advice and even specific plans that would have improved their performance. Principal A reported that “he and I had some really good conversations. It’s just that he couldn’t put it together. It’s like he had it in his head but he could not do...it didn’t equate to any teaching change.” The basketball coach/teacher who failed to supervise the dressing room also failed to improve after Principal D developed, directed, and guided him through a specifically designed growth plan intended to help him in the area of planning. He described the meeting when the teacher was told he was not being rehired. He said,

He was sitting there where you are crying. Just totally blown away by this whole thing. He just kept repeating over and over ‘I just had no idea, I just had no idea.’ I guess to a degree I had to emotionally detach. This was a likeable fellow. He was a worthless teacher but a likeable fellow. I kept telling him that ‘we have talked about each one of these things, and each time we talked I told you what my

expectations were. I am still waiting for you to fulfill these expectations. This is your third year as a teacher. You have not fulfilled these expectations yet. I don't think it is likely to happen.'

The teacher who wrestled with the student under the table was not able to learn from watching himself on video or by visiting the classrooms of successful teachers. Principal F said,

I even had him agree for me to put a camera in his classroom and (have) me videotape it without him knowing it was being videotaped. He didn't know what period or anything like that. Basically it was on most of the time. Maybe not always recording. And then I would bring him in here, and we would sit down and critique the video. And he never realized why he had the problems he had.

Principal O reported one of the non-tenured teachers he did not rehire:

did not get any better the whole year. He did not have positive evaluations at the end of the year. I told him that 'I'm not going to throw you away. I'm going to work with you some more to get this thing turned around.' I really needed him, and I thought I could save him. The next summer he went and took classes at UT dealing with teaching strategies. He went to a couple of workshops. So I thought it's going to be much better. He started off, and he was as bad as he was the first year. He went back to lecturing. Even in his lectures he would wander...very bad.

Principal R said that his teacher "just wasn't willing to do anything." He told about another teacher who told him that he was not going to change. He said, "I've just got to do it my way."

### The Importance of Getting Along

High school Principal H recounted his decision to not rehire a well-known basketball coach who had left another high school to coach there. Although he was described as a coach who "had an excellent record," he was not rehired because he was

“not a good fit” at that school. Principal H said, “It was not a matter of his coaching ability. It was a matter of how well he worked with the kind of people he had to work with here.” This principal repeatedly talked about the importance of “fit.” Although he never defined the term, it was clear that it served as the basis for personnel decisions. He added that fit was more important than potential or performance to him.

Principal C echoed this position. His decision to not rehire a guidance counselor was based on her inability to “get along” with the other guidance counselor. Both had been successful teachers in the same department at the school, and both had excellent reputations as teachers. They were not able to get along in the guidance department. According to the principal, the rift became noticeable to the students as well as to the teachers. Attempts at reconciliation by peers and by the principal were unsuccessful. The solution was to not rehire one counselor and to tell the other that if the same problem existed with the replacement, her next assignment would be back in the classroom.

This principal described a potentially far more insidious case. It involved a second year teacher who had “put his hands” on a student to move him out of the room. Principal C said,

The threat and use of physical force was his primary management tool. It’s sort of strange that this is one of the first times that I have had - this second year English teacher who is very competent intellectually, but he was the one who grabbed a kid and sort of escorted him to the door and then used some language with him outside the door that was very inappropriate. This and in combination with a lot of other things. But when I told him that he was not going to be rehired, I went to his room during the lunch break, closed the door, removed any kids who were outside went over to him and sat down and told him that he would not be rehired and strangely, even based on the number of problems he had the last two years, he acted like it was a total surprise. And so what he does, he jumps up, uses some profanity not toward me but just curses out loud which is ... This is a guy who is a youth minister, speaks at the local Christian church, and then comes around the desk. I got up because I thought he was going to throw a punch. Not to be

melodramatic, but I was just waiting on him to do something physical, and I could do whatever was necessary. Things like that just aren't pleasant, and I don't seek that type thing but this guy ... I just told him 'you know why you're being released at this point? Here is a perfect example. You concern me because I feel that you want to harm a child, you know this is indicative of why you're gone.' I just said adios amigo. Just pack your bag. Not to be flippant, but I thought for a minute that he was going to get physical.

Principal O told about a case that involved a bizarre combination and variation of several of the themes mentioned previously. He said,

In hiring him, I contacted all of his references. They spoke very highly of him. So we hired him. The board, the superintendent, and myself all thought it was a good idea to get him in here. As the year went on the evaluations were all positive that we did on him. He taught well. He jumped through the hoops when he was supposed to. We went through all of the basics – the way the evaluation was structured and so forth. But there were other things that came up which were not substantiated in any form or fashion. It was basically that he was being too friendly with the girls. I started kind of behind the scenes interviewing some people – students and so forth, and found out that he had done things that made a lot of students feel very, very uneasy. I gave all of that information to the superintendent. He and I sat down and talked about it and so forth. He said that he had been hearing some of the same things in the community. He hadn't done anything inappropriate, but it was just the way he talked to them. Like 'I can help you get a job downtown...if you need a ride home I'll give you a ride. I have talked to your mom and dad.' He got very friendly with their parents at the same time. I don't think he meant anything by it. I think he was just trying to fit in too quickly for our community. He had so many students feeling uneasy we had to let him go. He wasn't a coach, but he sure wanted to be. He made some of the coaches feel uneasy trying to butt in to whatever they were doing. They came to me wondering 'are you going to let this guy be our assistant coach?' He came back to me and asked if he got an offer from another school would I give him a positive or negative reference. I said that 'I will tell them what I told you. You just tried to fit in way too quickly up here.'



### Summary of Causes

It seems that few teachers are not renewed because they are poor instructors or are not knowledgeable in their discipline. Only one administrator, Principal E, specifically talked about test scores, and he admitted that the fired teachers scores were not bad. He said,

It sort of came to my attention that we were two or three weeks away from the writing test and she didn't even know where the materials were and hadn't really done much with it. But actually she did more with writing than I had anticipated. Her writing scores were real good from that year.

Those who are not rehired were those who had poor classroom management and interpersonal skills. They could not get students to behave, and they use inappropriate methods to try to get students to behave. They were frequently derelict in performing their professional responsibilities. They said or did what was determined to be inappropriate things to students. They did not have the ability to examine and reflect on their own teaching objectively and to respond to criticism and suggestions about it. They were not able to fit into the school culture, and were unable to get along with others on the faculty.

### Perceptions about School Culture and Vision

The principals all seemed to have a clear picture of, and vision for, their school. All but two, Principal B and Principal L, seemed to portray their schools as warm, nurturing, child-centered, team-oriented places. Principal A was at a new school in its

second year of operation. It was formed by the combination of the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades from smaller outlying schools. Principal B said,

This is a new school. We're only in our second year of existence. We've only had one situation. When this school was formed it was formed from three other schools – elementary schools – and with the middle school concept. They brought kids down here from \_\_\_ Elementary School and \_\_\_ in the mountains and another school here in town. And so teachers in those grades were given choices whether or not to come here. And some of the teachers who volunteered to come were senior teachers with good standing and good records and were great teachers. Some of them were ones who more or less – I kind of got dumped on. To say that in a very plain and simple way. I had twenty-five teachers here and twelve were first year teachers. I had about six more who had a year or less experience. So I had a very, very young staff.

Although the principal admitted that in terms of personnel he “got dumped on,” he characterized the school as being like a family. He said that they knew each other, knew their families, and knew what they did on weekends. He saw this as a strength but admitted that it was a cause of concern when he made the decision to not rehire or fire someone. He said that he had a close personal relationship with all of the teachers.

Another one of the middle school principals, Principal E, said many of the same things. The school was described as being “pretty tight,” and it had a “family atmosphere.” This school was also organized into teaching teams. The principal and assistant principal had both taught at the school for many years before becoming administrators. One of the high school principals, Principal G, described her staff as being “real good.” She also said that the school operated with no hidden agendas. In her interview, she revealed that two thirds of the staff were not on tenure. Most of the administrators characterized their faculties as being good overall. Principal F said that his school and faculty was easily the best in the county. However, he admitted that he harbored ill feelings toward the “central office” because he had requested to be transferred to another school last year, and the request

was denied. The faculty was aware of the request. The closeness of the faculty precipitated an interesting phenomenon at one school. Despite the fact that they had a “family atmosphere,” Principal E admitted that the non-renewal of a teacher set off a wave of uncertainty and even paranoia. He said,

One or two of them...one especially...has come to me and it really bothered her some of the things that the person who was not rehired was saying about me. And all of these people had been around me for some time and ...I’m a decent person...bottom line and I treat staff here pretty nicely and go out of my way to try to do things...to make morale high...and want teachers to feel like it’s a good place to work...and I work at that very hard. Still one of the things that happens when somebody is not rehired, even though all these people know me and they have been around me all of these years, there is always that thing...am I going to be next...will this happen to me? Even though maybe they were part of the process.

Principal J described an interesting situation. He was trying to get support or affirmation from the non-renewed teacher’s department for his decision and received none. He said that “I talked to the other department people. Normally they are very opinionated, but for some reason they would not tell me yes or no on this teacher.” He did not explain why their agreement was important.

A unique description of a view and a vision of a school came from the principal of a rural high school with slightly over 1,000 students. He spoke with pride about being responsible for getting six tenured teachers dismissed. He offered no apologies and said that he could care less if it blemished their personnel records. Obtaining the best-qualified teachers for his school was difficult. It was nestled between three or four other systems that paid more. He said that the only thing he had to offer was a better environment. It had to be safer, more orderly, more focused than other schools. Those things had to be identifiable enough to attract and retain teachers, to cause a sense of pride in students and

parents, and to meet the instructional needs of students who would otherwise be relegated to a second rate education. In his words,

We don't for some strange reason. I don't know what it is. Again, I am very proud of our record...getting rid of those people...you see the difference ... I'm digressing here... in our system and your system is that you can afford to attract the very, very best. Because our level of confidence here can attract them and because of the, we hope, the safe environment and the good environment in which to work we can attract others. But it's just hard when you have (city system), (city system), and (city system) who can pay 8,000 to 10,000 dollars more. That's a problem. But anyway we hope that our environment is an attraction.

Principal D commented that he felt his school was becoming more focused. He said,

It is more my style anyway. I do tend to be more direct. I set high expectations and remind folks about those expectations. I don't think I do so in an aggressive way. I think that folks who know me know that there are some burning issues we are going to deal with as a school and that there are things we care about to be priorities. The thing that just popped into my mind was your superintendent saying (in a radio interview) that everyone in our schools knows what we're about and that's a pretty good description of me.

He said that he did not welcome controversy, but he did not run from it either.

Principal L admitted that he was barely able to “keep his head above water.” This was his first year as a principal. He said,

I was trying to catch up on all kinds of things, and was not able to work with the teachers. I have worked real hard to overcome that, but I don't know them too well. I was a little relieved because the director took charge (of the non-renewal), but I also felt bad because I knew it was my responsibility. I was really just kind of in the shadows for a lot of things. When things got prioritized, working with teachers to improve was always put last. I have not been able to do the encouraging and working with teachers that I'd like to.

Principal N indicated that all interviews and hiring were done with the involvement of the leadership team. She used the word “we” frequently in talking about the actual hiring of the teacher. She said,

We do our interviews by leadership committee. So I had my leadership team, and we conducted the interview. This young man...we were looking for someone to help out in coaching. He was assistant basketball coach and an assistant football coach. He had probably three years of experience at two different places. We talked a little bit in the interview process about why he left those jobs, and that kind of thing. He came in, and we hired him.

Significantly, that was the last time she used the word “we” in referring to actions taken with that teacher. She handled everything else by herself.

There was little mention or discussion about mentoring or other support structures for new teachers. There were two notable exceptions. Principal E said,

Of course she had two mentors. I had one mentor for her in her grade level. And I had a good solid language arts person. Well, she was just not open to any suggestions from any of these people. She had been teaching X amount of years, and she knew how to do it.

Principal O indicated that he “referred him to his mentor and a couple of other teachers to get their input into teaching techniques.” Principal C said that he provided what the law required but did not elaborate on what they did or on their effectiveness. Principals E and F, both middle school principals, relied on their grade level teaching teams to provide support. They also indicated that the inability of the non-renewed teachers to get along with teammates entered into their decision to involuntarily separate them from the school. Unfortunately, the prevailing attitude seemed to be “sink or swim.” However, it was clear that all of the principals had a vision for their schools. Although the description of the vision was often somewhat vague with some of them, it was clear that they felt that the faculty needed to be competent, the school needed to be safe, and the community had to be supportive.

## The Role of the Director of Schools

The principals apparently had little problem with support from their director of schools. The directors were generally supportive of the principals' actions. In some situations, the director actually initiated the non-renewal. Despite that support, politics frequently came into play with personnel matters. All of the principals acknowledged that the director of schools had the final say in personnel matters. However, they also all agreed that despite the fact that the director was now appointed and not elected, political considerations were still important. Principal A said that he was reasonably sure that he was going to recommend that a young male teacher not be given tenure next year. He also said that he was also reasonably sure that the director would say that he was going to receive tenure. He said,

If there was a recommendation like that this year he (the director) might or might not go along depending on, for lack of a better word, the politics of the situation. He has to live with that. He and I are very close. I would not ... I'll give you an example. We have a teacher this year. I would probably...borderline...it's a second year teacher. He's a young man in our system. His family is in the system. His dad retired from the system ... a good kid...pretty poor teacher right now, but salvageable. This is his second year. If next year he doesn't improve, I'd not hire him back. My recommendation would not be; but I am sure he (the director) would tell me that's not going to happen. And so, I would not...my recommendation would be...part of my job is to make life easier for him. Whether that be the best way or not, that's the way it is, that's the reality of it.

Principal L described a meeting with the director of schools during which time:

He informed me that he did not want to rehire him. I did not know what the procedures were at that point or actually how to handle it. He said that he was going to do it. The letter was actually hand delivered by the director of schools.

Another administrator, Principal B, admitted that the impetus for non-renewal came from the director's office and that it was because someone had someone else in mind for that position. According to her, in her third year "they all of a sudden decided that she was not a good teacher." In response to the question, "Do you rehire a teacher because they are a good person, because they are politically connected, or because you want to save the superintendent some grief," she replied, "Are you talking real world or philosophy now? In the real world – politics. Philosophically – what's best for the kids. In those cases where the political world rules, it comes back to bite you." While acknowledging that decisions made by the director can either hurt or help you as a site administrator, Principal H seemed to agree and remarked that he or she (the director) could rightfully be influenced by considerations that are beyond the scope of the principal. But then he added,

If you want your job, and if you think it is worth having, then there are some things you just live with. And in all of the cases I can think of the person has ended up being all right. He is the boss, and we kept them. I just had to live with it. Sometimes it has to do with considerations which are far beyond our part here at the school. I understand that. They are in an appointed position hired by elected officials. So there are things there that might not have to be dealt with in business but we have to.

Principal E related the story about a teacher who was not renewed over his objection, primarily because a drug dog "hit" on her purse during a routine search. Nothing incriminating was found, but the principal said that "word got out" about the incident. He was concerned and opposed not rehiring her because she had been an acceptable teacher in a field where it was difficult to find teachers.

Principal J reported a situation when the director failed to renew a teacher over his objection. He said,

I actually made a recommendation to rehire a teacher in our economics department, and the superintendent overrode me and recommended that she not be rehired. I think she should have been given another year. She had been out for maternity leave and a central office person with economic certification who had retired from the old school of teaching came in to relieve her for six weeks. He insinuated that she had not taught them anything – that they were only on Chapter 3 or 4. Well, this teacher jumps around. She wasn't teaching from front to back. She was a first year teacher, and she had picked out areas that she was comfortable teaching at the beginning of the year. Then he came in -- he was from the old school -- and then the superintendent's wife came in to evaluate her and she did not do that good of a job that day. So he listened to them rather than me. I even, after he told me that he was not going to recommend her, I talked to some upper level students about the two teachers. I did not let them know why I was talking to them. I talked to 10 students about the personalities and teaching methods. I asked them which one they felt they had learned the most from, and 8 out of 10 said that they learned more from the regular teacher than the substitute.

Principal M described a situation that involved a disagreement between him and the director of schools regarding renewal. He said,

I had a music teacher that we did not rehire in the third year which I was opposed to. That person I shared with the high school. She was not renewed. There was some disagreement between the administrators as to whether we should or should not renew her. Between me and the high school. I was very...when you talk about emotions and feelings...I felt real strongly that when you keep somebody for three years and all of their evaluations are good, then they need to know why they were not being rehired. Of course, you know with the way the law is you don't have to give them a reason. We don't, and I could not. It was almost like reading that she had done a great job for three years and then we're saying that we're going to dismiss her. I know who my boss is. In the end I went along with it, but she was assigned to my school because she was with me most of the time! I said that I disagree, that we've done this person wrong. I feel like what we should have done was...we went from there, and I did what I had to do because the director of schools said this is what we're going to do. So that's what we did.

On one occasion an ex-board of education member who apparently still had some influence with the director tried to put in a good word for a teacher with Principal D. The teacher was not going to be renewed. This intervention took place just before the



teacher's summative conference, and the principal was reasonably certain the teacher and ex-board member had talked. He said,

A former board member approached me after a basketball game Right before we did the summative evaluation... the week of. It had been scheduled for 10 days or so. He pulled me aside to tell me how much he thought of this young man. What an outstanding teacher he thought he was and that he hoped I shared the same feelings than he had. What that did make me do... I had a deadline. So I sort of ignored the deadline. I went back over the entire evaluation and looked at every *i* and *t* to make sure that every issue had been attended to. I had not done scores on the summative, but I had a good idea what it was going to show. I felt that knowing the politics of this former board member that my leadership was going to be called on it. I was going to be raked through the coals because that's kind of the nature of this school district. That's the only unsatisfactory thing about the school. It's outstanding in every other way but...the school zone is vast. We have a board member who ran on platform of having a new middle school built, but he did accomplish refusing to have any money spent in this building for ten years for upgrades in the name of adding a new middle school built. So we have done without, and he was defeated in the last election a year ago. But apparently he still has clout with the new superintendent. He was one of the major forces in bringing the superintendent here. And I have to tell you that my backside got a little tight dealing with that but it was not when to stop me from what I was going to do. But I did not want to be called on it from a procedure point of view.

Principal P said that he “had a few board members come to me and ask why. They said that they understood that she is a good teacher and wondered why I was not recommending her back.”

Principal F indicated that all employment recommendations must be acted on by the superintendent because he had exclusive hiring and firing authority. In this case, one teacher, a relative of a central office staff member, was reassigned to another school at the end of his third year, thus circumventing the principal's recommendation. But, he also reported that this same director “scared the (expletive)” out of a teacher the principal had personally escorted to his office for a reprimand. He was then not rehired. Other principals reported that their director was letting them be the “final voice” in personnel

matters since they must live with the decisions. Principal D said that the unwritten rule in his system was that “if you put them on tenure, they are yours for life.” He then added that the rule, while good in theory, did not work very well if principals were moved around and teachers were not. Principal G said that politics frequently come into play in her system. She described one case where, “there was a whole lot of politics being played. He (the dismissed teacher) got his family involved with the board members trying to out vote me. It didn't happen but it could have happened if there had been different Board members.”

In Principal J's situation, board members have some measure of dominion over specific schools. He said,

This is a political county. Each school board member basically has a school. The school board member that is actually over the high school -- if any one board member is over any one school -- always says that I know more about who to hire than he does. He was never entered politics into that. Now if it may be a custodial job, an aide's job or something like that he has never told me who to hire but he will call and give a recommendation for someone but he's not saying that I have to hire that person. He always tells me that I have to hire the person but that he did tell the person he would call. He's very easy to work with.

He discounted the role of the director by saying, “The superintendent, well, we really don't have that many people who are certified trying to get into (this) County because of our pay. There was more politics in the past than there is recently because of our need for teachers.”

Most of the principals said that the director was generally supportive but wanted and needed to be involved. Principal Q said that the director:

Was always supportive. Basically he just wants to...he just doesn't want to be blindsided. He starts by telling us at the first of the year that if by the middle of the year you've got somebody you're not going to be hiring back, let me know, and you need to do what you can to prepare them. He doesn't want us to just

come in and say I'm not going to hire this person back and he finds out the day we make our recommendation.

Principal O said,

He was very supportive of it, and like he always tells you how he feels and then says that now it's your decision. 'You can give your recommendation to me, and I can either go with it or not. You need to know that I have heard the same things you have heard, and I will support that you don't rehire him.' He was been very good about...he will let you know exactly how he feels, but then he'll put it back to you and say now it's your school. You're the immediate building supervisor, now you make your recommendation.

Principals O and Q were describing the same person. In talking about the role of her director, Principal N said,

He was aware of it, but never got involved. This guy (the non-renewed teacher) called him because during that week of a week he thought that he could go over my head, but I had already talked to (the director), and he was going to support me. That's all that happened, and when he told me that he was going to go over, and I told him that's your prerogative to do that, but I'm telling you that my mind is made up and Mr. (director) will tell you that. I've already talked to him about it. If you want to do that, go on, but I think you should start thinking about what you're going to do next.

Principal R said that he felt that cases that involved coaches were much more likely to involve the director and school board in his area than those that involved classroom performance. He said,

In the case of the coach, there was more involvement by the school board and superintendent because they get more comments about extracurricular things than they do things in the classroom. Generally, the things in the classroom don't get out to the point that it's in the community where they are upset and everything. I really haven't had problems when parents have come in to talk about the other things.

His director of schools was supportive of his recommendation.

Each principal reported that, just as he or she was charged with looking at the big picture in the school, the director was charged with seeing the big picture for the system. However, increasingly directors of schools are adopting the practice of allowing the building level principal to make personnel decisions that most directly affect them and the operation of the schools.

### Emotions and Stress

The principals expressed awareness and concern about the emotional and economic impact the action might have on the teacher. Most of the teachers who were not rehired were young men who were just starting families. Three of them had wives who were pregnant at the time of their non-renewal. Some had spouses or relatives who worked in the school or in the system. There were other extenuating circumstances that entered the minds of the administrators as well. Several comments were similar to that of Principal A who said that the teacher in question was a “nice young man.” Several were in high profile positions such as basketball coach and had developed constituencies or followings of their own. One was an assistant football coach at a nearby high school. The principals were acutely aware that not rehiring these teachers, in fact, created another vacancy in a coaching position - one that is becoming harder to fill each year. Principal E was faced with the prospect of not rehiring an older, single woman who had confided to her peers that she had moved to the area just to care for her grandchildren. Their mother, her daughter, was suffering from a severe drug dependency problem.

Principal C said, “I don’t want you to think that I am insensitive.” Principal K echoed the feeling by saying that “I didn’t feel bad about this one in any way. Oh no, no,

no. I go through many things. I try to take care of things really well, and I give people the benefit of the doubt.” None of those interviewed were insensitive. They were aware of extenuating circumstances. They knew that their actions were likely to cause some people to think that they were heartless and unkind. They all were able to express their conviction that the interests of the student, often expressed as the school, were ultimately more important than those of the individual teacher. Such decisions were not made without stress. Principal C said that he did not renew the teacher because “I wanted to protect the children.” He went on to say that “the point of it is that the school and the children are the most important thing.” Principal E said, “I did not feel like we needed someone on staff who was going to stir up trouble and be divisive...especially in their own grade level, not even talking about the rest of the school.” Principal F weighed the interests of the school against those of the dismissed teacher. He reported that the teacher asked him, “What am I going to do about my baby?” His response was, “Well, that’s one child. I’ve got 100 I’m worried about.” Principal H said that “you have got to keep focused on what we are here for – to provide the highest quality education possible for every student who walks in the door.” Principal I, a middle school principal, summed up this sentiment by saying, “It is the most difficult decision I have ever made, and this was the first time in my long educational career that I have done so. However, I felt compelled to make the decision because the students were not benefiting from this teacher’s instruction.”

In making this decision, all of the principals reported experiencing emotional stress that most commonly manifested itself in sleeplessness. Apparently a lot of principals are awake at three o’clock in the morning during certain times of the year. Several commented to that effect. Principal B said, “are you kidding, I was awake at

3:00 in the morning this morning over a personnel matter.” In reflecting on his decision not to renew a young teacher, Principal D said, “Those things entered my mind three or four nights before at 3:00 AM when I was staring at the ceiling.” Principal L said that it was difficult and that “it certainly comes into your mind that he is a husband and a father.” Principal O said, “I still felt very badly for the man. He was single, has a son who has cancer who he has been supporting financially. I know that it put a hardship on him. I still think about it every so often.” Principal Q said that despite their inadequacies, “it is kind of hard to do.” Principal N said that she “lost a lot of sleep. Number one, when I first found out about it, and then...when I thought that maybe there had been something that I had missed.”

Many felt this same personal disappointment and a sense of failure. Principal A said that he tried “his best to salvage him because he was such a nice guy.” Another said, “I felt totally helpless. I couldn’t solve his problem.” Another principal commented, “I feel like I failed him.” Principal G said,

I feel like sometimes when you're telling a teacher that they are not coming back you are putting yourself into a position of playing God, and nobody has that right to be that. It's hard even when you've done everything you can do to help this teacher it's the best interest for your school. It's still very hard.

Principal J said,

As far as to not rehire a teacher – first year, third year, whatever, that is the hardest part of my job. I am not the type of person to put people out on the street that need a job. But then again, when it comes to making that decision, I have to ask myself what’s best for the kids. And even though I ask myself if I would want my kid to be in that classroom. I would not have objected for my kid to be in her classroom. But it was the fact that it was what was good for the school as a whole. Again, lots of nights not sleeping wondering what to do the best or right decision to make here. Over three years I had never told a person you have to straighten up in these areas here or I’m not prepared to give you tenure. I have always thought that they could read between the lines, but I’ve not done that good of a job at

preparing them as I should have. It was very hard, very hard to face the person. It is the hardest thing emotionally that I have to do.

One administrator said that the hardest part of being a principal “emotionally, is that you feel that this is someone’s life you’re playing with.” As mentioned previously, a disproportionate number of cases involved male teachers. Some of these were young and just starting families. Principal A said, “I know what it’s like. You’re sitting there holding bills.” All but two of the principals acknowledged that it was very a difficult, trying, and emotionally stressful decision for them to make. Principal L said, “ I wasn’t there for the first two years. It really wasn’t clear to me until the end of the year that he wasn’t doing what he should be doing. I kind of felt like I had failed it. It breaks my heart.” Principal A summed up the feelings of many of the other principals when he said, “Most of us are pretty kind hearted towards young people. It’s tough. I mean, you know, like I failed him.” Principal R said that “you always have mixed feelings if you care about people. You hate to do that to anybody. This is the hardest part of the job – you know it is.”

For some of the principals, this emotional response was intensified by the actions of other educators. The principals who had “inherited” problem teachers either from another school as a result of a transfer or from the person who had been the principal at that school previously harbored and expressed a great deal of resentment toward the previous principal. Principal A said,

I have some resentment too. The principal he had before is a friend of mine and a nice man. He never should have hired him the first year. This is a man who was so bad...you don’t rehire him. You don’t give him a second year. You don’t put him off on somebody else. I feel like he didn’t do his job well.

Principal D said that the former principal “never should have hired him back last year.”

Another asked a supervisor, “Why are we still dealing with the same problems this year?”

He then answered his own question. The former principal liked the teacher, and he knew that he (the principal) personally was not returning to the school the next year. He said that the most puzzling thing about the situation was that the departing principal then warned him about the teacher. He confessed that in addition to resentment, he had lost respect for a man who was his friend. I asked if he felt any lingering hostility toward the former principals. He said,

I have a little less respect professionally for that person. We still remain friends. That person is no longer a principal. He was... a history might be important here.... (much of this information was too revealing of people, places) The stress of the whole political situation got to him. He came in here after Labor Day, and the easy thing to do was to avoid confrontation. The parents ate him up.

The practice of trying to send your problems off to another person seems to be alive and well within school systems.

### Evaluation and Improvement

The principals all described the efforts to “work with” the teacher prior to making the non-renewal decision. These efforts ranged from just sitting down and telling the person what he or she should do to developing detailed professional development or growth plans. High school Principal C said, “It eventually came to the point that I had him down for 6 things he was not even to consider doing.” They report meeting with the teachers several times prior to making the non-renewal decision and in addition to the regular evaluation process. Several principals said that they were very hands-on in their approach to administration. Principal G said that she was “very much in there with the teachers.” The fact that two thirds of her teachers were not tenured might explain that fact. Principal F said, “I met with him about some of those issues throughout that school



year.” Later he re-emphasized the point by saying that “I met with him repeatedly.” Principal D said, “I kept telling him we have talked about each one of these things,” when the teacher kept asking why. In talking about his decision to not rehire the basketball coach, Principal H said that “In his case I talked with him about it-worked with him for a couple of years.”

The principals did say that they reviewed previous evaluation records to determine the extent of professional growth or the lack of it. Decisions to not renew teachers seemed to be arrived at cautiously and deliberately. All of the principals expressed the need to formally discuss the recognized problems and to develop a paper trail of their interventions. Much of this was done in isolation from the formal evaluation process and was seldom done in the presence of witnesses. The principals frequently used the same terminology in discussing these meetings. They talked in terms of “sitting down” with them (the teachers). Principal C said that he “went over to him and sat down and told him he would not be rehired.” The same principal, in talking with a counselor he was non-renewing, “sat her down and said, ‘ma’am, based on what I know now this is the only way I can do this’.” Principal D “sat down with him and reviewed the growth plan from last year.” Principal E said that he “called her in, sat her down, talked with her. Principal F said that he “sat down and talked to him. He understood and agreed that it might be the best thing that ever happened to him.” Principal Q used the same terminology and differentiated between the evaluative conferences and when “they just came in and sat down.” Principal R said that “I sat down with the person and said “hey look, you need to work on your PR with parents.” He also said that when he hired a teacher back he had previously dismissed, “We sat down and talked about it.” Later,

when this same principal dismissed a tenured teacher he said, “Basically, we sat down and I said it’s time.”

### Use of Formal Evaluations

The principals differed substantially in their use, and estimation of the value, of the state model for comprehensive teacher evaluation. What Principal F described as “worthless,” Principal A said was at least “better than the other evaluation system.” There was a consensus that the most useful part of the comprehensive assessment program was the reflective record. Several remarked that it was beneficial to get the teachers thinking critically and objectively about what they had done. Principal A spoke positively about the evaluation process but admitted that he felt that it did “very little” to help teachers grown professionally or to improve. He mentioned the high volume of paperwork involved. There was “a lot of writing.” Principal B said that the evaluation was used in her school more in a prescriptive sense. She said that “once we identify the teachers who frankly do not have the skills, it becomes pretty much a part of the evaluation to identify those areas and give a prescription for improvement.” Most principals admitted that the summative results of the formal evaluations of the non-renewed teachers were often “adequate to good.”

Several reported that the non-renewed teachers actually scored well on the formal evaluations. Principal O said, “The evaluations were all positive that we did on him. He taught well...jumped through the hoops when he was supposed to.” Principal P said that “in her evaluations, as far as a teacher in the classroom, were pretty good. She taught art. She did a pretty good job in the classroom. She was an above average teacher.” The

feeling seemed to be that, like Principal F said, “Just about anybody can do a dog and pony show for three days a year.” One principal confessed that “I don’t use the evaluation process to make employment decisions, I use it to help them be a better teacher. But I can walk around the building and learn more about what’s going on and talk to the kids, kids will tell you everything if you just listen.” Several reported that they had returned portions of the evaluation materials, primarily the unit and lesson plan and educator information record, to be redone or amended. Principal N described her use of her evaluation system. She said,

At that time I did two evaluations and the assistant principal did one. In my first evaluation...which was probably done in September I guess. No, I didn’t see that (immaturity and inappropriateness) at all. He was very careful and really focused on what he was doing. And when he got more comfortable, that began to occur. So my next evaluation was at the end of January. He had another one in between, and there was nothing discussed there. I did in his appraisal record note that he needed to work on the appropriateness of his communication skills. Not only that but usage. We talked about those things. There had been other issues where he had made off the cuff comments to one of our female staff members. He was married. I pulled him in...that probably occurred in January...and I did an appraisal record on that.

All of the principals were using the state evaluation system, and they were familiar with the process and instruments. The portion of the process that requires teachers to reflect on their own teaching was viewed favorably by all of the principals. Only two of the administrators seemed to systematically use the process in conjunction with systematically developed growth or improvement plans. For the others, the feeling seemed to be like that which was expressed by Principal C who said, even without the evaluation, “... you know if they are doing his or her job.” A premium was placed on informal drop in visits and face-to-face communication when a crisis arose.

## Lame Duck Problems

The issue of the problematic “lame duck” teacher was not a major concern for most of the principals. Principal A reported that the teacher he did not rehire continued to do “his job like he had been doing – trying to improve all the way through the rest of the year.” Principal D said that the teacher was “doing a much better job. It was almost like the weight was off his shoulders.” A middle school principal said that the situation involving the teacher he did not renew “actually after that it was a little better they told me. She was nicer to get along with after that. It sort of had a steadying effect on her. She actually had enough years in Texas to retire and retired there. Said she could have gone back. She was single at the time and had a male friend there and I was surprised she didn’t go back.” Principal L said that “one thing I found that was odd was that his professionalism actually increased – got better. “ Principal O reported,

I’ve honestly got to say that he was very professional and finished out the year as a teacher should even though he wasn’t returning. He went through and taught his lessons. Because that’s the first thing I do – to check very often on whether or not they’re following through on their responsibilities. And he did. He turned his records in when he was supposed to. He came in and sat down to make sure he had everything turned in before he walked out after the last day. He even thanked me for allowing him to teach here.

Principal J described his non-renewed teacher’s performance as “about the same. Sort of cold, you know, toward me.” Principal K had a similar experience. He said, “She was upset for the rest of the year, but she kept coming and everything.” Principal Q said that in his two most recent cases, the teachers developed “kind of a general attitude about doing things. As far as teaching, they just continued along line with what they had been doing. No real big problem.” Principal R pointed out that even indirectly performance does

suffer. He said, “I think performance does suffer because they have got sick days, and you know that they are going to be out a lot. Other than that, I haven’t viewed them as not doing anything in the classroom.”

The lame duck period was not as pleasant for some other principals. Principal C said that he had a couple of teachers who practically quit working. This high school principal said,

I have had some problems in their slowing down work. And the amount of work from three of those people I told you about has been minimal. It is a time when we need everything to be at the maximum – in the springtime.

Principal N said that her non-renewed teacher “wanted to get people to get me to change my mind. He tried to enlist people that he knew had my ear who I had known for a long time.” Principal P said that the non-renewed teacher “did okay in the classroom, but tried to get things stirred up here. You’re going to have some negatives because they are going to gain some support on the staff.” One weapon or defense that was frequently used was the threat of a negative recommendation if conditions grew worse or a positive letter of recommendation if the teacher sincerely tried to show improvement during the time left before the end of the school year. Principal H said,

Yeah, I have had them practically quit work. And between the two kinds of people you might be talking about... for those people who I have written a good letter of recommendation. I have told them look you have this but you need to carry it on out. If they call me I will tell them that you did not continue to work. And then I had those who I didn't want back under any circumstances. I have just kept them under close supervision and reminded them that no matter where they go will have to have some sort of recommendation, and finishing strong would not hurt them.

As will be discussed later, this admonishment was not necessarily true.

## Letters of Recommendation

The principals were frequently willing to write carefully crafted letters of recommendation. This was most commonly done by focusing on the positive attributes of the teacher and totally avoiding comments about the major concerns and problem areas. Principals often suggested in these letters that the teacher's future success might be a function of place and assignment. He or she has the potential for success in another school, subject, or grade level. The content of these positive or neutral letters seemed to deal primarily with generalizations like "he works hard and is cooperative." However, the author of those comments conceded that most principals can "read between the lines" of such letters. Principal A said that "you know you have to guard your comments, but who knows...you might find a situation that fits his temperament and personality. And there probably are some things out there that he could do very well in education." When asked if he would write a positive letter of recommendation for a teacher he dismissed, Principal C said,

Oh no, what happens is that – and you know this as well as I do. We have people who write a letter of recommendation. They'll tell a teacher – now these are not friends of mine, but many have told me that they'll write a letter – a positive recommendation about a person if they'll resign. I think that's what is wrong with administration. We don't tell it as it is.

Later, when asked about the specific case that he had cited, Principal C responded that it depended on what was meant by being fired or dismissed. He said, "I wrote a letter for her accentuating all of the positive points she has. And she has many." He added that "I don't think it is unethical to write a letter accentuating someone's positive attributes if they hadn't been negative to kids and your mission. I just don't think it is unethical to do

that.” Principal D reported that he told the teacher he dismissed that if he were contacted, he would “want to be able to report that from 2/6 to 5/6, you were one of the finest teachers in our building.” Principal J said, “I told her that I would, yes.” Principal R said that “I have written letters of recommendation, and I have worded those carefully. If I do that, I probably did not include all of the weaknesses. But you know I didn’t say some things, and I did word them carefully.” Principal M, who had disagreed with the high school principal and director of schools about dismissing a teacher said,

I would write a letter of recommendation, but I would be honest. I would not say anything that is not true. I would try to be as honest as I could, but if I told them that I would write a letter of recommendation, I would do that. I would not capitalize on weaknesses.

When asked if she had written positive letters, Principal G emphatically said,

No, no. And when I get calls from other schools, I tell them the truth. I’ve had them tell me what a wonderful person they are, and when they get here, they’re awful. No, I tell them the truth. I might not tell them every little detail, but you know. I am always truthful.

Principal I said that in one case he did write a letter of recommendation, but in it he stated that he was recommending the applicant for a teaching position in another subject area.

Principal B said, “Let me see, how would you put this? I have tried to look for their very best assets and steered away from any of the negative things.” Principal E described one of his letters of recommendation as not being “what you would call a glowing recommendation, but it was at least a positive recommendation for her.” Principals apparently are willing to search for, and report, the positive attributes of many of the teachers they have not rehired and hope that they do better teaching somewhere else.

## Resignation

The principals frequently suggested that the teacher submit a letter of resignation prior to any official non-renewal action in order to “keep your record clean.”

Principal L said that eliciting a resignation was “probably a good option. That’s probably the exact route I would have gone. Yes, I think that’s probably the best option in most cases.” Principal Q said that “they ended up resigning and going on, but they approached me about that first, and I said yeah, they can go ahead and do that if they want to before my recommendation goes to the superintendent’s office...if you want to do that whatever.” Principal D said that he “told her that the best thing for her to would be to resign.” After talking with the director of schools he told her that if she resigned, he would at least not write a bad letter of recommendation. He said that “if she goes out and applies in other places, I might not give her a glowing recommendation, but at least I won’t say don’t hire this person because she’s a terrible person.” This principal did write a positive letter of recommendation for the person the director did not renew over his objections. The principal who did not rehire the counselor who could not get along wrote her a positive letter as well. Principal I said,

I don’t see any ethical way to encourage a teacher to resign prior to dismissal unless the case involved a terrible incident. The teacher mentioned previously was abrasive, even though she is professional sound. I have never persuaded someone to quit to avoid a blemished personnel record.

Principal A equivocated by saying,

The ethical thing you do crosses that line. If you try to coach someone or if you want to use an extreme case, harass, someone into resigning before you have to do, the process of not rehiring it’s certainly unethical. Whether it’s illegal, I don’t



know. If he had not asked me I would not have suggested it to him. But because he had cooperated so thoroughly and if I were him that's what I would have done. Just as an opinion from me to him as a heart to heart. I would do it again.

Principal J said, "She did not elect to resign. I don't know why she would not have but she chose just to go ahead and not be rehired." Principal R admitted that all of the situations he described as non-renewals were in fact resignations. He said that "I guess that I have had three teachers that I have given that option (to resign)."

Most of the principals seemed to be willing to use the writing of positive letters of recommendation as a way of eliciting a resignation and as a precaution against the "lame duck" condition discussed previously. Judging from the relatively few lame duck problems reported that this threat, defense, or "deal" appeared to work.

### The Impact of a Teacher Shortage

The primary concern expressed about hiring and induction was the emerging scarcity of teachers and the competition rural systems face from the larger, more affluent systems. The principals frequently said that the non-renewed teachers were often those who were hired late in the summer and, in some cases, even after the school year had begun. Most admitted that the interview process was flawed and unreliable, at best. Principal C said that even some complicated three-tiered process was not error-proof. One rural principal, Principal A, bluntly stated that "we have a hard time finding teachers here." He advertised for a middle school teacher in three counties and got one application. Principal J said,

The shortage actually started hitting us last year in certain areas – special ed, math, foreign language. This year math and foreign language. I've not had to

make that decision since it hit, but I think in the math department that the one I let go three or four years back, I would probably give him tenure today -- just to have a teacher. Right now we are three short this year. I found one – a retiree from Florida. I've talked to two others. We are the lowest paying county in our area. All of the surrounding counties pay just a little bit or a whole lot more than we do. One of them is from another county, and if they get their budget worked out they will be teaching in that county. If they don't get their budget worked out they will consider teaching here – that's math. Right now we have a Spanish and French opening. We lost our French teacher to five more thousand dollars per year in his home county which is \_\_\_\_\_.

Middle school Principal E echoed the concern about the lack of desirable applicants. He also said that he frequently deferred to his teaching teams when hiring new teachers. He said that even if there was a candidate he personally thought to be better, "I go ahead and let them make the decision." In one system, principals are limited to applicants whose names are on an approved list provided by the central office. The criteria for getting an applicant's name on that list was not known.

When asked if he was satisfied with the number and quality of applicants he was receiving, Principal L said emphatically,

No, not at all. In fact, that was a bad problem last year and an even worse problem this year. The problem we're having in staffing is due to the fact that we pay less than almost anyone else around. Even after they apply and take jobs here, they are looking somewhere else for better pay. The sad thing is that the best people we can find are not certified. As an administrator, one of the toughest things to do is to hire good teachers.

When asked if he would have supported the non-renewal of the teacher had he been in an area where he had difficulty finding a replacement, Principal L said, "I don't know that I can answer that right now. I know that I would probably show a little more toleration."

Principal P responded to the same question by saying, "Yes, that entered my mind, but I knew that if I kept her I was going to have a whole lot of problems down the road. I have

had a hard time filling that position.” He admitted that hiring was becoming a major problem but said, “My thinking was it is probably better to keep looking than to keep a problem.” Principal Q said that he too was having trouble finding teachers. According to him, the shortage has “hit us big time.” When asked if he had ever kept a teacher he wanted to non-renew simply because of the shortage, he said, “Only in one case. It was a marginal teacher, but I tend to give them more chances than most places.” Principal R made the same confession. He cited one case involving a special education teacher. He said, “Yeah, I did that this year. It was a special education teacher.” He went on to say that he had given tenure to others for the same reason. He reported,

I’ve had to give tenure to a teacher, and not in one of those areas (math, science, special education). And I’m still not sure how good of a teacher she will be...if she’s going to turn out to be a good teacher or not. When you look at it, there was no one else in the pool when I hired her, and there’s still no one else out there. So sometimes you have no other choice. You just have to do it and just keep on working.

Shortages seem to be appearing throughout the school structure but seem to be more pronounced in science, math, and foreign language at the high school level. High school Principal C was forced to dismiss a Spanish teacher well into the school year. That teacher’s replacement was one who was subsequently not rehired this year. Part of that problem appears to be related to a large number of teachers who are retiring. One principal said that he had three science teachers retire last year. Many principals said that they were not in systems that were competitive with salaries. The rural systems were losing experienced teachers and not obtaining new teachers who chose to go to more urban areas that paid more. One system that borders Georgia was, according to the principal, at “the top of the food chain” in Tennessee but at the bottom when compared to Georgia. The inability to hire teachers later in the school year for the next year, or even

early in the summer, was a noticeable handicap. Many of the teachers who were not rehired were hired late and were seen as the last and only option.

### What Happens to Them

Remarkably, the principals revealed that the teachers they did not rehire frequently were hired in other systems. Most were able to say if and where they were now teaching. Principal A reported that the teacher he was going to dismiss resigned and was hired by another system “within a week.” Both the teacher and his spouse were hired by a large urban system. Most of these hirings took place without checking on references or the reasons for separation. All but one of the principals said in each case where the teacher was hired somewhere else; “no one called.” Principal E said that the non-renewed teacher was “pretty tight with the people at UT in special education and they put her in touch with someone in Oregon. She was single, mobile, so she left here and moved out there.” Principals K and O reported that teachers they did not renew were later hired by other principals in the same system. The coach that Principal N did not renew was immediately hired by another system. She said that “I heard some time after that...in fact I saw him at a conference...he told me, in fact, that he was in administration.” The disgruntled basketball coach Principal P did not rehire is “in North Carolina now teaching in an elementary school and coaching at the high school.” Principal F said that his dismissed non-tenured teacher “got a job in \_\_\_\_\_ County this year, so that did make me feel a little better because of his family situation.” Even the teacher the Director had threatened in Principal F’s presence “ended up with a job in \_\_\_\_\_ County somewhere.” The high profile basketball coach Principal H did not rehire was promptly hired by

another system, and it “looked like he left on his own.” Principal R said that his former basketball coach had been hired by another system. He also admitted that he hired the coach knowing that he had been non-renewed in his previous school system. He said that “this coach I let go...but he was a coach...a basketball coach, and you’ve got to have those things. The only other applicant I had was someone who had never been in a coaching position before or teaching or anything like that. We’re a basketball school.” The shortage of teachers has apparently driven some school systems to hire what one principal called “a pig in a poke.” It is surprising that, with information readily available, no one seemed to be interested in looking a little more closely into the poke. Principal C did recall one incident when a principal who was a close personal friend called to inquire about a teacher. He said,

I received a call from \_\_\_\_\_ who was in \_\_\_\_\_ County. It is the lowest paying area in the state. He said to me, ‘I just want to ask you this question – this teacher had taught there before – you know I can’t get anybody in the middle of the year to come in and teach a language course. I just want you to know that \_\_\_\_\_ applied for the job, and all I want to know is has he done anything to little girls or anything detrimental to the children? ‘Cause I’m going to have to hire him.’ I said no he has not and I told him what he had done. He said, ‘I don’t want you to think that I don’t value your opinion, but I had to hire him. Because I can’t get anybody else this late.’

Even knowing that teacher had been dismissed during the school year, the principal hired him. The principal who had dismissed the teacher went on to say that “I think that administrators ought to be prosecuted in court for recommending someone just to get rid of them and passing that problem on. These people will do the same thing no matter where they are, and it gives all of us in education a black eye.” That black eye seems to be largely self-inflicted.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a relative dearth of information in the literature about dismissing non-tenured teachers. However, in a recent article in NEA Today (May, 2001), it is stated that the NEA Representative Assembly directed the NEA staff to conduct an investigation regarding the rights of non-tenured teachers. In their preliminary report, a state-by-state comparison was made showing the employment rights of non-tenured teachers. The categories were “right to know reasons for non-renewal,” “right to meet with administration,” “mandatory evaluation of job performance,” “mandatory plan of improvement,” “violation of evaluation procedure results in contract renewal,” and “union can bargain just cause protection.” In Tennessee, the only areas indicated as rights were in the areas of mandatory evaluation and mandatory plan of improvement. I anticipate and recommend that more attention will be given to the topic in the future.

This particular study was designed to address the questions or issues that surround the administrator’s decision to not rehire a non-tenured teacher. The study focused on the actions, reactions, and emotions of principals who were directly responsible for those recommendations or decisions. In-depth interviews were conducted that focused on identifying the primary reasons for the decision, perceptions about the overall characteristics and culture of the school, the role of the director of schools in making the decision, the presence of political considerations at either the school or system level, the emotional impact on the principal of making a potentially life altering decision, the presence of extenuating circumstances that caused additional concerns, efforts to provide

assistance for the teacher both through the formal evaluation process and through informal means, the presence of problems associated with having a “lame duck” teacher, counseling teachers to resign rather than face the prospect of having a blemished personnel record, problems associated with hiring practices and conditions, and the practice of writing positive or at least benign letters of recommendation for teachers who had been denied continued employment.

### Summary of Findings

It was apparent that most teachers who failed to be rehired or who failed to receive tenure were seen to be poor disciplinarians and not to have very good classroom management skills. Three cases involved the teacher misusing corporal punishment or physical force with students. Additionally, they were generally derelict in performing their professional responsibilities. The teachers seemed to be incapable of positively interpreting and applying suggestions and recommendations for improvement. Despite having an appropriate paper trail marked by numerous conferences, it was not uncommon for the teacher to react to the decision with complete surprise. The inability of the non-renewed teacher to work cooperatively with peers, team members, or people who held the same job title was also evident.

The unit school, primary school, seven middle schools, and nine high schools represented by their principal in this study were generally viewed by the participants as being cordial, collegial, student-oriented schools. Three were organized with a recognizable form of team structure. The principals all seemed to be active, hands-on administrators who took a great deal of pride in knowing what was going on in the

classrooms. They all indicated that they were involved in making changes and improvements that would make their schools better.

What is the role of the director of schools in making the decision not to rehire a non-tenured teacher, and what role does politics play in that decision? The director of schools was identified as being an important player in the decision-making process. Five participants reported cases or situations where the director either did not accept their recommendation, circumvented the decision by making an in-system transfer, or decided to not rehire a teacher despite the principal's recommendation to do so. Three of the principals accepted that action without objection or comment. Two were less agreeable but acknowledged the director's authority to do so. Despite the fact that the State of Tennessee now requires all directors to be appointed, several principals indicated that political decisions were still common. The situations that were described as being political most commonly involved those teachers with strong local ties and those who had relatives working in the system. Ramsey (1999) said, "Because schools are full of people wielding power over other people, most school systems are permeated with politics." He added, "If you think you can become an effective school leader without being involved in politics, you're kidding yourself" (p. 92.) None of the principals I interviewed seemed to be kidding themselves. They recognized the political nature of public education and were willing to get involved in it.

What are the emotions, feelings, conflicts, and misgivings that principals experience in making the decision not to rehire non-tenured teacher. It was clear that most of the principals saw this employment decision as a critically important one both to the school and to the individual teacher, and as a result, they frequently expressed the stress and tension associated with making it. Whan and Thomas (cited in Whitaker, 2001)



said that the literature was clear that principals were under constant stress and that it manifested itself emotionally, cognitively, and physically. One administrator indicated that she was “guilt sick” about having to make the decision. Others admitted that they felt that they had failed in providing assistance. Having the authority to deprive a teacher of his or her livelihood was seen as “playing God” by some of the participants. It is not surprising that there is an emerging shortage of principals. Ferrandio and Tirozz (as cited in Gilman and Lanman-Givens, 2001) state, “There will be few applicants, fewer of them will be qualified, and more schools unable to find good leaders” (p. 72). Gilman and Lanman-Givens attributed much of that decline to the presence of too many pressures being placed on principals. Clearly, the decision to make life-altering decisions about employment contributes to those pressures. Hurley (2001) said, “Even though we know how demanding principals’ work is, we continue to ignore this fact and suggest that principals must possess an ever-expanding range of skills and knowledge and take responsibility for practically everything in the school” (p. 37). The principals I interviewed echoed this feeling and added that the acceptance of these responsibilities often took place at the expense of their health, family, and emotional well-being. One principal asked when and why we came to feel that it was important to be considerate of individuals who were unacceptable teachers, but he did admit that it was an emotional time for him. However, the emotion he said that he most commonly felt was anger, not concern or sympathy. The most common reaction to the emotional aspect of the decision was sleeplessness.

Almost equally intense was the feeling some of these principals expressed about being “dumped on” by other principals or by his or her predecessor in that school. This practice seemed to be fairly common and took place where smaller schools were being

consolidation, where there was turnover, or where administrators were frequently moved. A loss of respect was often expressed, and this frequently involved individuals who were friends and who had worked together for a long period of time.

What part does the formal state evaluation model play in the decision making process? The general feeling among the principals in this study was that the state's comprehensive assessment (teacher evaluation) program was largely ineffective as a way of improving instruction. There appeared to be a significant disparity between summative evaluation scores and employment decisions. Whitaker, Whitaker, and Lumpa (2000) described the formal evaluation process as "an opportunity to raise the morale and self-worth of educational professionals in all of our schools" (p. 131). Likewise, Ramsey (1999) called evaluation "a powerful tool for getting the most out of people" (p. 53). The principals I interviewed seemed to disagree. Tucker (2001) stated that principals seemed to be reluctant to use evaluation, growth or development plans, or even remediation except as last resorts which are destined to fail because "the principal has moved beyond wanting to help the teacher improve to wanting to simply dismiss him or her" (p. 52). The opinions held by the principals I interviewed seemed to support that contention. These principals tended to trust their instincts and informal observations. Considerable importance was attached to the number of parental complaints. Three principals indicated that the students were their most reliable source about the effectiveness of a teacher. The principals did attach a great deal of importance to having a documented record of problems and interventions.

Do principals agree to write positive letters of recommendation for teacher they do not rehire? Despite being concerned with principals who had passed their problems on to them, the principals seemed to be willing to write these letters of recommendation.

Although they described most letters as being neutral or only dealing with the positive aspects of the teacher, they expressed their conviction that other principals were able to read between the lines. It appeared that the reason for writing such letters was to elicit an agreement with the teacher that he or she would reciprocate with a letter of resignation. Several principals also indicated that this was a way to make sure that the teacher performed at an acceptable level between the notification and the end of the school year. This practice appears to have worked and resulted in the presence of relatively few problems associated with lame-duck teachers.

Are there profession and ethical ways to encourage teachers to resign prior to dismissal in order to avoid a blemished personnel record? My study revealed that the principals frequently suggested that the teacher submit a letter of resignation prior to any official non-renewal action in order to keep his or her record clean. This stands in marked contrast with Fournier's (1984) observation in his study, "Principals preferred dismissal to coercion and exchange of a recommendation for a resignation" (p. 43 ).

### Recommendations for Professional Practice

Hopefully, the findings of this study will generate discussion that will lead to positive changes in the process of dismissing of non-tenured teachers, as well as in creating an environment that reduces the need to do so. These changes might be realized in several different venues.

First, it is essential that the findings become part of the conversations and dialogues in which principals are involved. There are a number of specific areas in which this discussion could take place – the Principal's Study Councils, the various Principals'

Academies, administrator preparation and training programs, and Tennessee State School Boards Association forums. It is difficult to have a profession where there is a prevailing lack of quality control.

There is little formal training dealing with screening and interviewing applicants. Likewise, not much consideration has been given to showing principals the appropriate way to write letters of recommendation. These responsibilities should be part of an on-going professional development program for administrators and should not be added just in response to a specific crisis or problem. New administrators are taking positions in schools at a rapidly increasing rate. Evidence exists that supports the contention that principals will be faced with the probability of having to hire large numbers of teachers in the next few years as well. New principals will be hiring new teachers.

The state evaluation program must be used more effectively in context with improving instruction and not just to meet a legal requirement. The process lends itself to providing a way for teachers to be presented with areas they need to improve and to administrators and teachers sitting down to develop a plan to do so. This type of “sit down” conference seems more professional and potentially more productive than the ones that take place after the decision has been made to not rehire. It is unlikely that even the weakest teacher would emerge from the notification conference surprised about the decision, if the need for improvement had been addressed throughout the process.

### Recommendations for Future Research

A study of this nature perhaps raises more questions and issues than it answers. At any rate, hopefully it has generated ideas for future research. Several potential areas are immediately obvious.

The influence of gender might be considered both from the point of view of the administrator and the perspective of the teacher. This study involved only three female principals. A majority of the teachers who were not renewed were males. A study that focused exclusively on the elementary school level might provide additional or different data. The respondents in this study were primarily from the middle school and high school levels.

A related issue could involve the apparently disproportionate number of coaches who were involved in non-renewals. The visibility of the position and the increased number and intensity of student, parent, and community contacts, might contribute to that occurrence. It is also possible that coaching duties might sometimes interfere with teaching responsibilities.

While this study indicated that lame duck teachers were generally not problematic, additional research might be directed toward this group of people. It is possible that actions or behaviors that the principals saw as inconsequential were actually passively resistant or noncompliant. An examination of the responses of the lame duck teachers themselves to the non-renewal would be informative.

## Conclusions

It is obvious that principals are finding it harder to find qualified teachers than ever before. Henry (2001) stated that this is a shortage “experts say will require 2.2 million teachers over the next decade” (p. 6D ). The teachers who were not renewed tended to be the ones that were hired late in the summer and often as an act of desperation. Rural systems found it hard to recruit teachers. Their salaries were frequently substantially lower than those in the urban areas. Darling-Hammond (2001) supported this position. She said, “We trace shortages of people willing to work at the salaries and under the working conditions offered in specific locations” (p. 12). One principal was attempting to address the working conditions aspect of the shortage because the salaries were largely beyond his control. He saw this condition as a challenge and opportunity to make his school’s climate so attractive that it might counteract the salary difference. This shortage has also contributed to the unfortunate circumstance where teachers who has been dismissed or not renewed from one school system apparently have little trouble finding teaching jobs elsewhere. The shortage has resulted in administrators making bad employment decisions. One principal said that he knew they would be the same person and same teacher regardless of where they taught.

What are the ethos and pathos involved in teacher dismissal? I was told once that it was much easier to hire a good teacher than to make one. I was also told that teachers do not just become bad overnight. They have a history. This study revealed the importance of making good personnel decisions – first with hiring, then with retention. In these interviews, little was said about the induction process. No real mention was made about the effective use of mentoring teachers or even team members in assisting

struggling teachers. Kramer (2001), reflecting on her experiences as a new teacher, said, “In my opinion, teachers who have mentors or who serve as mentors will feel more valued as people and professionals and will be much more likely to perform well on the job” (p. 412). It was my impression that the teachers who discussed in these interviews were isolated, or had isolated themselves, from other teachers who might have provided support, encouragement, and assistance.

Much has been written regarding teacher accountability. Clearly this is an important issue. Better tangible accountability measures would assist administrators in making appropriate personnel decisions. However, in an effort to alleviate fear and apprehension, teachers have consistently been told that such measures will not be used to make personnel decisions. The resulting study indicates that the effectiveness of instruction is rarely a part of those decisions. Instead, principals find themselves trying to catch teachers leaving the room unattended, verbally or physically abusing a child, or arguing with another teacher rather than not being productive instructionally. Obviously, all of those previously mentioned problems are major and should justifiably be grounds for dismissal or non-renewal, but the possibility of having a friendly, non-abusive, professionally responsible, but non-productive teacher is a real one. My study seemed to indicate that as long as there were no noticeable problems, there were no problems and little chance of non-renewal.

One principal told me, “We are not an employment agency.” Unfortunately, when it comes to hiring and retaining relatives, friends, and allies, we seem to function that way. Even when choices are possible, the best-qualified person does not always get hired. That person might not be on the mysterious “approved” list, or that teacher might not be the choice of the team. If directors are serious about giving principals the authority to

make decisions about their own schools, and then holding them accountable for those decisions, the hiring and retention clearly needs to be divorced from the politics of the system. One principal said could never happen because the director is a hired employee of an elected board. An approach to teacher hiring that places both the authority and he accountability in the hands of the principal is essential.

It is recognized that even the best intentions about hiring are meaningless if there simply are not applicants for the positions. Teaching salaries should be equalized across the state so that the rural high school can actually compete with the system that now pays 10 or 12 thousand dollars more.

It is essential that principals accept the responsibility of protecting students from bad teachers – not just his or her students in his or her school, but all students in all schools. These teachers are the ones that “give education a black eye.” That black eye looks just as bad in Pikeville as it does in Bristol. It is essential that principals incorporate the evaluation process into meaningful professional growth and development. It is essential that principals openly and candidly share information about applicants for teaching positions. Finally, it is essential that principals exercise their legal authority and ethical duty to deny tenure to any person whom they would not want teaching their own children or to any teacher by whose performance they would not want their professional reputations and credibility judged.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Informed Consent Form

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** David W. Messer

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** The Impact of Dismissal of Non-tenured Teachers on Principals in Tennessee

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read the material carefully and decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

**THE PURPOSES OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY ARE AS FOLLOWS:** In this paper, I intend to examine the issues that principals face, and deal with, in making the decision or recommendation to bring about the involuntary separation of non-tenured teachers.

**DURATION:** The research project will begin in October and conclude in April. I anticipate that each interview will last approximately one hour.

**PROCEDURES:** A questionnaire will be mailed to the principal of every public school listed in the State School Directory that has a zip code ranging from 37301 to 37938. These principals will be asked to return a response if they meet the criteria of (a) having at some point made the decision that resulted in the involuntary separation of a non-tenured teacher, and (b) being willing to discuss all aspects of the case in an in-depth interview. From the pool of respondents, I will initially select ten principals to contact to schedule interviews. This selection will be based on recency of experience and convenience of sampling. Using the interview guide, an interview will be conducted.

**AUDIOTAPING:** With your permission I would like to audiotape this interview. Only I will have access to the tape which I will personally transcribe, removing any identifiers during transcription. The tape will then be erased. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law and your identity will not be revealed in the final manuscript.

**POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:** There is a risk that the nature of the questions asked might cause the interviewee to feel some discomfort. You are free to decline to answer questions of that nature.

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS and/or COMPENSATION:** This study comes at a critical time for both teachers and administrators, and it may contribute to the understanding of the impact of involuntary separation. There will be no compensation for participation.

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call David W. Messer at (865) 984-0084, or Dr. Russ West at (423) 439-7619. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6134 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Every attempt will be made to see that my study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the East Tennessee State University/V.A. Medical Center Institutional Review Board, the Food and Drug Administration, and the ETSU Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis will have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

**COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT:** East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury which may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at 423/439-6134.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** The nature demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. Your study records will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

---

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER/ DATE

---

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR /DATE

---

Appendix B

Questionnaire

**This questionnaire is designed to assist in identifying principals in the eastern part of the State of Tennessee who have had experience in dismissing (or not renewing the contract) of non-tenured teachers.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

School Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Best day of week /time of day to call to schedule an interview (circle 1 or more)

M T W TH F SA SU                      Time \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you ever recommended that a probationary or non-tenured teacher not be rehired at your school? (check one)

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

2. Within the past five years, how many such recommendations have you made? (check one)

1 - 3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 - 6 \_\_\_\_\_

7 - 9 \_\_\_\_\_

10 or more \_\_\_\_\_

3. When was the most recent recommendation? (check one)

5 years ago \_\_\_\_\_  
4 years ago \_\_\_\_\_  
3 years ago \_\_\_\_\_  
2 years ago \_\_\_\_\_  
1 year ago \_\_\_\_\_  
this past school year \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have you ever counseled or encouraged a probationary or non-tenured teacher to resign prior to your having to make a recommendation for non-renewal? (check one)

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

5. Within the past five years, how many times have you done that?

1 - 3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 - 6 \_\_\_\_\_

7 - 9 \_\_\_\_\_

10 or more \_\_\_\_\_

6. When was the most recent case?

5 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

4 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

3 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

2 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

this past school year \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this completed form in the enclosed addressed envelope.**

## Appendix C

### Summary of Surveys Returned

1. Have you ever recommended that a probationary or non-tenured teacher not be rehired at your school? (check one)

Yes	-	68
No	-	33

2. Within the past five years, how many such recommendations have you made? (check one)

1 - 3	-	46
4 - 6	-	14
7 - 9	-	1
10 or more	-	1

3. When was the most recent recommendation? (check one)

5 years ago	-	8
4 years ago	-	7
3 years ago	-	10
2 years ago	-	11
1 year ago	-	14
past school year	-	15

4. Have you ever counseled or encouraged a probationary or non-tenured teacher to resign prior to your having to make a recommendation for non-renewal? (check one)

Yes	-	37
No	-	29

5. Within the past five years, how many times have you done that?

1 - 3	-	29
4 - 6	-	2
7 - 9	-	0
10 or more	-	0

6. When was the most recent case?

5 years ago	-	3
4 years ago	-	5
3 years ago	-	7
2 years ago	-	5
past school year	-	11



Appendix D  
Introductory Letter

Dear Principal:

The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance in a research project that I am conducting as part of my doctoral work at East Tennessee State University. For my dissertation, I will be examining the experiences of principals in East Tennessee regarding the dismissal, or non-renewal, of non-tenured teachers. My study will be of a qualitative nature and will involve in-depth interviews about those experiences. These interviews will be face-to-face, and I anticipate will last approximately one hour.

I have enclosed a brief questionnaire that has been designed to assist me in identifying principals to interview. I am currently a high school principal, and I realize that your time is valuable and that you already have far too many things to do. However, I am convinced that these in-depth interviews will provide data that ultimately can benefit all of us in this position.

If you are willing to become part of this research effort, please complete the questionnaire and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Your responses, both on the questionnaire and in the interview, will be confidential. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at (865) 982-8914 or (865) 984-0084.

Sincerely,

David W. Messer

## Appendix E

### Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me about the most recent situation when you did not renew the contract of a non-tenured teacher?
2. What were the emotions, feelings, conflicts, and misgivings that you experienced knowing that your decision was potentially life altering to the teacher and critically important for the school?
3. Do you believe that there are professionally ethical ways to encourage or coach teachers to resign prior to dismissal to avoid a blemished personnel record? Have you ever done that?
4. How did you deal with "lame duck" teachers between notification and the end of the school year? Did you have any problems?
5. Have you ever written positive letters of recommendation for teachers you had decided not to rehire?

Appendix F  
Meta-matrix

Principal	Gender	Length of Service as Administrator	Type of School	Nature of Problem	Role of Director and "Politics"	Hiring Practices	Extenuating Circumstances	Emotional Issues/responses
A	Male	7 years	Rural Middle school	Poor discipline	Involved, supportive, but has rehired over negative recommendation	DOS hires Recruiting is difficult Positions filled late	Likeable wife recently had child She was in system as well Allowed to resign	Sleepless nights Felt helpless and disappointed with self "Inherited situation" - Resented previous principal for allowing problem to exist
B	Female	2 as administrator Adjunct for Tennessee Tech in Ed Leadership	Rural Middle school	Poor discipline Hygiene	High degree of involvement Political pressure brought to hire, fire in many cases	Difficult to recruit Pressure to hire local	Community where everyone knows what's going on Improvement had been noted – somebody else wanted her job	Sleepless nights
C	Male	9 years	Rural City system High school	Poor discipline Improper contact and language	DOS is supportive	Difficult to recruit Pressure to hire local Competition from wealthier systems	Coach, local Possible criminal charges Wife on staff	Wrestling with self Hard on you Greater commitment
D	Male	9 years	Urban Middle School	Poor discipline Poor planning Improper conduct	Central office staff supportive Ex-board member attempted to influence	Large bureaucratic system frequent principal changes	Wife recently had child Father teaches in system	Sleepless nights Awake at 3:00 Playing God Resented predecessor
E	Male	15 years	Suburban Middle School	Discipline problems Did not get along with team Paperwork problems	Supported one and dismissed another despite principal's recommendation	Frequently hire late	Had grandchildren in school Daughter had drug/alcohol problem Single, older Allowed to resign	Sleepless nights Playing God "Team" had been involved – they felt paranoid

F	Male	11 years	Suburban Middle School	Discipline problems Did not get along with team “poor example”	High degree of involvement supportive	Extreme pressure to hire local	Wife was pregnant Basketball coach with some support on staff Allowed to resign	Sleepless nights Concerned with 100 children not just one
G	Female	6 years	Suburban High School	Unprofessional	DOS supported But family got board involved DOS let principal put one on tenure he did not agree with	High turn over 2/3 of the staff in non-tenured many late hires Recruiting is difficult	Wife recently had child Allowed to resign by saying that he did not want job back	“I mean how can you enjoy it?”
H	Male	23 years	Urban High School	Bad “fit”	High degree of involvement Supportive but has rehired over recommendation	Large supply previously but getting smaller	Allowed to resign on own terms Well known, respected coach	You don’t do those things coldhearted
I	Male	1 at this school 18 total	Suburban Middle School	Teacher was abrasive	No involvement	Hiring quality teachers in hard	Single parent	One of most difficult decisions ever made Note: survey indicated he had done this several times before, but in interview said it was first time
J	Male	8 years	Urban High School with rural students	Wondered what kind of teacher she would be	No involvement	Severe shortage Low pay	Departmental silence	Hardest part of job Sleeplessness
K	Male	30+ years	Primary school in highly mobile tourist area	Did things beyond her scope of authority	Transferred to another school after 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Nothing mentioned	Knew she was interviewing at another school in same system while process in progress	Tries to everyone the benefit of the doubt I didn’t feel bad about this one in any way
L	Male	First year	Large comprehensive high school serving entire county	Late to school Showed movies unprofessional	Director took lead in non-renewal	Severe shortage Low pay	Already had another job lined up	Extremely hard thing to do heartbreaking

M	Male	9 years as principal 14 as teacher	Middle school Small independent system	High school dissatisfaction with lack of growth of program	Supported high school principal's recommendation	No problem	Was considered to be doing a fine job at the middle school	Sleeplessness Disagreement with other administrator and with system being used
N	Female	7 as administrator	K-12 unit school rural	Immaturity Inappropriate comments Reputation/rumors	Supported recommendation	Becoming more difficult Inaccurate or misleading information from previous employers	Coached two sports Support in community and staff Potential for "fiasco"	Sleeplessness Concerns about how she had done her job community response
O	Male	5 years as Principal	High school in a resort own	Inappropriate comments/familiarity Poor teaching techniques	Supported recommendation	Decreasing population has to shuffle teachers	Single parent/son with cancer Married with family	Very difficult A people person It really, really bothered me
P	Male	10 years	Large high school medium sized city	Claimed that principal discriminated based on gender Started a club without meeting his requirements	Supported but board members questioned	Difficult to hire teachers	Had good evaluations Pockets of support	Hard decision it was tough
Q	Male	14 years	Suburban high school	Unorganized Inappropriate comments	Supported	Difficult to hire teachers	none	Agonize for months
R	Male	8 years	Small, rural high school	Abusive language Poor public relations	Supported	Difficult to hire teachers	Liker a lot of what he did Only 2 applicants	Hated to do it The hardest part of the job

Appendix G  
Audit Findings

**THE SOUTHERN CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

320 West Paces Ferry Road NW  
Atlanta, Georgia 30305  
(404) 261-5763 FAX (404) 261-0849  
[www.southerncenter.org](http://www.southerncenter.org)

Peter White  
President  
Cedric Suzman  
Vice President

August 14, 2001

Mr. David Messer, Doctoral Candidate  
East Tennessee State University  
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis  
501 Warf-Pickel Hall  
Johnson City, Tennessee 37614

Mr. Messer:

Please accept this auditor's letter of attestation for inclusion in your doctoral dissertation. Using the criteria that we discussed in your email of 10-14-00 and phone calls of 2-4-01 and 5-17-01, the auditing procedures have been based on procedures for auditing naturalistic studies found in Appendix B of Guba and Lincoln's *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985). I have found:

- The data were complete and comprehensive, and the organization of the work resulted in a solid, easy-to-follow flow of information. The research questions raised were important, linkages were evident and there was sufficient support to substantiate your findings. The auditability of the data is confirmed.

- There is no evidence of researcher bias. After listening to tapes of interviews, I believe that your inferences are logical and descriptions of phenomena are accurate. Examples fairly represent the data. Findings can be traced to raw data and notes and document entries indicate attention to the possibility of alternative findings. Your findings are confirmed.
- Sampling procedures, establishment and refinement of working hypotheses, and the methodology leading to decisions were identifiable, purposeful, and appropriate for a naturalistic study. The inquiry process is sufficiently thorough, and the dependability of the study is confirmed.
- There is evidence of triangulation, peer debriefing, and organization of document notes. It is clear that audit plans were integrated into the overall research design. The credibility of your study is confirmed.

Congratulations on the completion of your study. I believe that you set and maintained the highest standard of professional ethics and practice in your research, and the final product reflects that. There is no variable more important in educating our children than the quality of the teachers who are retained in the field. I am certain that your research will further the effort to maximize the learning environment for all students.

Sincerely,

Carol McCullough, B. A., M.Ed., Ed. S.  
Coordinator of Gifted Education, City Schools of Decatur,  
Consultant to The Southern Center for International Studies

VITA

DAVID W. MESSER

Personal Data:      Date of Birth: May 26, 1948  
                         Place of Birth: Knoxville, Tennessee  
                         Marital Status: Married

Education:            Public Schools, Knoxville, Tennessee  
                         University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee;  
   Education Curriculum and Instruction, B.S.; 1970  
                         University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee;  
   Education Curriculum and Instruction, M.S.; 1973  
                         West Georgia College, Carrollton, Georgia;  
   Educational Leadership, Ed.S.; 1985  
                         East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
   Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed.D.; 2001.

Professional  
Experience:            Teacher, Rockdale County High School, Conyers,  
   Georgia, 1970 - 1972, 1973 - 1977  
                         Assistant Principal, Edwards Middle School,  
   Conyers, Georgia, 1977 - 1979



Principal, Edwards Middle School, Conyers,

Georgia, 1979 - 1982

Principal, Heritage High School, Conyers,

Georgia, 1982 – 1985

Principal, Sevier County High School, Sevierville,

Tennessee, 1985 - 1990

Principal, Maryville High School, Maryville,

Tennessee, 1990 - Present

