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It's Not as Simple as Just Getting Rid of the "Worst" Ones – Unfortunately,

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Academic Leadership Journal

In March 2008, the Center for Union Facts initiated a “contest” in which they pledged “to pay the ten worst “union-protected” teachers in America \$10,000 apiece to get out of the classroom.” The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association seem to be the real targets of the program. Edward J. McElroy, former President of the American Federation of Teachers, said, “The misnamed Center for Union Facts, an anti-union front group run by lobbyist Richard Berman, has announced the launch of a new “assault” on teachers that will include television and newspaper advertising.” The Center’s website talks at length about the difficulty in firing “bad teachers.” In addition to telling teachers how to decertify their union, the site includes the statement that “poor-performing tenured teachers are “rarely or never” terminated.” Now, two years later director Davis Guggenheim and producer Lesley Chilcott have resurrected the assault on teacher unions and tenure in “Waiting for Superman.” Current AFT President **Randi Weingarten (2008) has responded by saying that** “the film casts several outliers in starring roles—for example, “bad” teachers and teachers unions as the villains, and charter schools as heroes ready to save the day. The problem is that these caricatures are more fictional than factual.” While disagreeing totally with the campaign and the apparent pretense of the documentary, I have found one basic fact to be true – “poor-performing tenured teachers **are** “rarely or never” terminated.”

Each year superintendents 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..

The issue of hiring, developing, and keeping the best teachers possible has emerged as a national concern, and with predictions of a significant teacher shortage, a timely one. 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). The states and federal government have also raised the accountability stakes through “highly qualified,” “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.

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 judgment 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 an administrator makes the decision to dismiss a teacher 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.

The Dismissal of Tenured Teachers

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 principals are among these people. **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 and is being fueled in part by the Center for Union Facts contest, that the teaching profession is filled with incompetent teachers who are operating freely and totally protected by antiquated tenure laws.

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 that somebody needs to fire.

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?

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 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.

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 hundreds 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.

The Study

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. I identified several related concerns. These included the issues of principals using professionally ethical ways to encourage or coach teachers to resign prior to dismissal, how their attitudes about dismissal were shaped by their definition of the school culture, 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 who had made recommendations to involuntarily separate non-tenured and tenured teachers from their schools. This determination was made based on the responses to questions in a 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 an 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.

Of the 18 principals, 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. As a group 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. (see chart at the conclusion of the article)

Principals' Comments

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.

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."

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, 3×3. 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 worked 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.

The data indicates that 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.

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.

"Working With" Problem Teachers

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.”

The principals differed substantially in their use, and estimation of the value, of the state or system 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 the 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. All of the principals viewed the portion of the process that requires teachers to reflect on their own teaching favorably. Only two of the administrators seemed systematically to 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.

Inability to Improve

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 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."

Classroom Management and Interpersonal Skills

It seems that few principals actually do not rehire teachers 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 teacher's 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 were not rehired were those who had poor classroom management and interpersonal skills. They could not get students to behave, and they used 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.

Emotional Response and Economic Concerns

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 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 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 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 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 interests of the school against those of the dismissed teacher. He reported that he asked him, "What am I going to do about my baby?" His response was, "Well, that's 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 every student who walks in the door." Principal I, a middle school principal, summed this sentiment by saying, "It is the most difficult decision I have ever made, and 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 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 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 and exacerbated 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.

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

Easing Their Way Out

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 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 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.

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 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 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.

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 ___ College 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.” 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.” 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.

Implications and Recommendations

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 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 and local 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.

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.

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.

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 New York as it does in Hawaii. 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. The Center for Union Facts’ contest is misguided. “Waiting for Superman” misses the point. Really bad teachers probably would never admit to being bad. The reward and the movie should focus on administrators who fail to exercise their legal authority and ethical duty to deny tenure or to get rid of 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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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 faculty 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 "fir"	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 rd 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 town	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	Liked a lot of what he did Only 2 applicants	Hated to do it The hardest part of the job

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to assist in identifying principals 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 T H F S A S U 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.

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 – 1

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?

VN:R_U [1.9.11_1134]