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WHAT PRINCIPALS DO TO MINIMIZE THE NEGATIVE
EFFECTS OF THE INCOMPETENT TEACHER

Georgia S. Collins



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**WHAT PRINCIPALS DO TO MINIMIZE THE NEGATIVE
EFFECTS OF THE INCOMPETENT TEACHER**

A Dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate Studies of
Georgia Southern University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
In
Educational Administration

by

Georgia S. Collins

December 2001

August 10, 2001

To the Graduate School:

This dissertation, "What Principals Do to Minimize the Negative Effects of the Incompetent Teacher," written by Georgia S. Collins, is presented to the College of Graduate Studies of Georgia Southern University. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Administration.

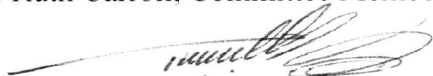


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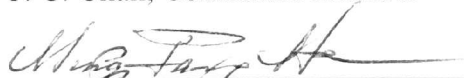
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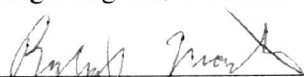
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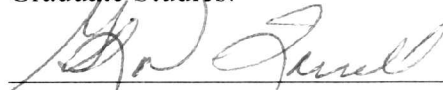


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DEDICATION

In recognition and appreciation for his patience, support, and invaluable input,

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband,

Stephen A. Collins,

the smartest man I know.

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Sincere appreciation is extended to my supervising chair,

Dr. Harbison Pool,

for his dedication to this project and for caring so much.

As “Educator of the Year,” his retirement will leave a deficiency in his department

that will not be easily filled. He is simply the best.

Appreciation is also extended to committee members listed below

for their wonderful input and insight:

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ABSTRACT

WHAT PRINCIPALS DO TO MINIMIZE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE INCOMPETENT TEACHER

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Principals and teachers are being held increasingly accountable for student achievement. Every effort should be made to increase the chances of student success in school and in the global community. In this study, the researcher examined the perceptions of principals in the state of Georgia with regard to incompetent teachers, which according to the professional literature are a deterrent to student achievement. As previous research and literature have shown, incompetent teachers remain in school systems despite efforts of building-level administrators to dismiss them. The main focus of this study was to determine the means of minimizing the negative effect of such teachers and to find strategies for coping with these teachers.

Both quantitative and qualitative inquiry methods were employed. Using a two-phase design, the perceptions of principals about incompetent teachers were first explored through a mail-out survey. This phase was intended to answer the proposed research

questions, some specifically and some in a more general way. The second phase consisted of interviews with six principals of various levels and in different school settings. The intent of the interviews was to find more specific answers to the overarching research question: *How do principals manage incompetent teachers who have evaded dismissal and remain in classrooms under their supervision?* The qualitative research inquiry method was implemented to enhance the statistical data and to provide more in-depth meanings to any findings.

This study did not result in a definitive meaning for the term *incompetent teacher*, but it helped the researcher more fully understand the concept and the idea that the incompetent teacher defines his or her own characteristics. A list of characteristics, compiled from the research, is only a database of information. It is not and cannot be a definition, because each incompetent teacher is an entity within himself or herself. A realistic viewpoint about how to overcome tenure, legal costs, and other roadblocks is part of the qualitative data gathered during this study. A list of suggestions, which will help with a broad spectrum of problems, and can be used to improve the educational focus of a teacher, was compiled using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Newly appointed administrators, administrators-in-training, and even veteran administrators can benefit from the experience of others. The present study concluded that 3.81% of the teachers in Georgia are perceived by their principals to be incompetent. The researcher hopes that this study will be used to improve the educational experience of those students who are in classrooms of incompetent teachers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Teacher preparation programs and state certification requirements have, until recently, served as deterrents to inadequate teaching performance. Preparation programs include training provided by colleges of education, standardized testing of knowledge, mentor teacher programs, and adequate support from administrators during the first years of teaching. Teacher accountability, however, is again being linked to student performances in many states, with the administrator of a school receiving much of the blame or the credit for the direction of student learning. Administrators must face the responsibility of managing incompetent teachers under their supervision. The need for remediation and improvement of ineffective teachers is compelling and should not be deferred for any reason (Airasian, 1993).

Even with the massive numbers of preparation, support, and remediation programs, ineffective, and incompetent teachers are hired and remain in classrooms. Their negative effect on students is often underestimated. The majority of research reviewed indicated that between 5% and 25% of our nation's teachers are incompetent, but fewer than 1% are dismissed for this reason. School-based administrators who directly supervise these teachers are often, but not always, to blame for the retention of poor teachers (Bridges, 1990; Ellis, 1994; Fuhr, 1993; Johnson, 1991). There are many roadblocks to teacher dismissals that are beyond the control of the administrator, no

matter how much documentation for incompetency they provide. Even the documentation process has been considered a barrier because of the time it necessitates for instructional leaders. Administrative roles and responsibilities in the management of the incompetent teacher are areas of concern for all school administrators who have difficulties dismissing an ineffective teacher who has a negative effect on the school climate, the remainder of the faculty, and, most importantly, his or her students. How these teachers are managed and supervised in order to minimize their negative effect and to ensure the highest productivity possible is an area that administrators should address (Claxton, 1986).

Background of the Study

Obviously, all effective educational leaders want to provide high-quality teachers in every classroom in their schools. When incompetent teachers are allowed to remain in classrooms, their effect can be devastating to their students. The public school system has an obligation to its students, parents, community, and faculties to strive for the highest quality education (Williams, 1996).

Defining the term *incompetency* in the education setting is difficult. Although much research can be found about incompetent teachers, the definition is not clearly stated. Many researchers describe what characteristics may indicate incompetency, but interpretation is very subjective (Lakey, 1976; Lawrence and Vachon, 1997; McGrath, 1993). Court cases have resulted in a very broad interpretation of the term (Robinson, 1999; Schweizer, 1998).

The effects of incompetent teachers can be found in lower teacher morale, a less positive school climate, monetary expenses, and, of course, lower student achievement (Jones, 1997). A school faculty cannot afford to continue employing any teacher found not to be competent to help students achieve their educational goals. A weak teacher may adversely affect accountability reports for the entire faculty and “the costs can be staggering” (McGrath, 1993). According to Lemon and Randklev (1990), monetary costs for dismissals must also be considered as the amounts for even an uncontested nonrenewal of a teacher can potentially cause havoc with a school system’s budget.

Administrators are faced with tenure laws and union problems when dismissal of a teacher is attempted (Bridges, 1990). Other impediments may include time limitations, nonsupport from a supervisor, or the threat of a lawsuit. Khan (1996) relates the problems that could arise from a trend toward “educational malpractice suits.” As Scriven (1997) points out, the costs of keeping an incompetent teacher far outweighs the costs of dismissing one.

The number of incompetent teachers remaining in classrooms reported by different researchers varies greatly. Figures ranging from 5% to 25% of the total work force of teachers can be found in studies (Bridges, 1990; Ellis, 1994, McGrath, 1993; VanSciver, 1990; Ward, 1995). All researchers reviewed for this dissertation, however, indicate their agreement that one incompetent teacher is too many to ignore.

Teacher evaluation systems are being investigated and upgraded throughout the nation. The subjectiveness of most systems leaves administrators frustrated and discouraged with the results of their attempts to document incompetency. Allen, LeBlanc, and Nichols (1997) believe that most evaluation instruments do not include

consequences for poor performance in the classroom. Suggestions for improvements in evaluation instruments include peer evaluation, student evaluation, and committees formed to support administrators and ease the burden of documentation and decision making (Adamson and O'Neil, 1993).

Due process, teachers' rights, tenure, and other issues are often researched and discussed in the available literature. It is the issue of the incompetent teacher who is not dismissed, and whom research shows has a long-reaching, negative effect on education, that needs to be addressed. How administrators are working with these teachers who remain on their faculties is difficult to find in available literature.

Statement of the Problem

Much of the literature and research address the role of a school administrator in the dismissal of an incompetent teacher, due process rights of teachers, and court decisions about dismissal. An incompetent teacher, however, may manage to keep his or her position as a teacher, even if an administrator follows all the guidelines and procedures to prevent this. Often, for reasons beyond his or her control, an administrator must supervise a teacher unsuitable for the position, and must somehow try to minimize the negative effects of this teacher.

Frequently, the far-reaching harmful effects of even one incompetent teacher are underestimated and the administrator may find himself or herself in an unpopular situation when he or she puts pressure on that teacher to upgrade classroom performance. The perceptions of school administrators should be considered when defining what constitutes an incompetent teacher, and the means by which an administrator addresses

the problem of this teacher who remains on the faculty against the administrator's wishes should be studied. Dismissal, unfortunately, is not always a feasible option and takes time to achieve. This study is an effort to explore alternative routes that administrators follow when supervising incompetent teachers in order to ensure that students receive the best possible education.

Research Questions

This study was intended to answer the major question, *How do principals manage incompetent teachers who have evaded dismissal and remain in a classroom under their supervision?* In order to address this issue, the following areas of teacher incompetency, as perceived by Georgia principals, were investigated using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques:

1. What characteristics of teachers do principals perceive as indicative of incompetency?
2. What do principals perceive as the negative effects of incompetent teachers?
3. What roadblocks to dismissal of incompetent teachers do principals most frequently encounter?
4. What percentage of teachers under their supervision do principals believe are truly incompetent?
5. Are there differences in the perceptions of principals based on demographic and biographic factors regarding incompetent teachers?

6. What leadership strategies do principals employ to minimize the negative effects of incompetent teachers who remain on faculties despite the need and effort to dismiss?

Importance of the Study

Students, regardless of their abilities, deserve the best education possible. High-quality teachers are the key to a high-quality education. However, there are no clearly defined guidelines for identifying the quality of teachers. As a result of the increasing shortages of teachers across the country, teachers are hired and remain on faculties even though their teaching skills and dedication to the profession are lacking.

Accountability is becoming a very important watchword in the teaching profession and supervisors of incompetent teachers will be held accountable for the negative effects of these teachers. Research reveals that an ineffective teacher may have a drastic, negative effect on a student that may last for years, even for life (Smith, 1995; Tucker, 1997; Waintroob, 1995b). However, teacher shortages will unfortunately further help many incompetent teachers to remain in the classroom. Finding a solution, or at least a method of minimizing the harm done to students by these teachers, is essential to an effective educational process.

The instructional leader of a school can benefit from the experiences of others when coping with an incompetent teacher. Recognizing the characteristics of such a teacher is the first step in the process of working with one, and school principals are an excellent source of information on, not only what characteristics to be aware of, but also what techniques have been effective in striving for improvement. Determining a teacher's effectiveness is a difficult and time-consuming task. The main objective of this

research is to ease that burden and improve the educational arena. It is hoped other teachers, central office personnel, policy-makers and other vital members in the process of education will employ the findings of this study.

Assumptions

The present researcher must assume that responses to survey and interview questions will be honest and based on knowledge of the education professional. It may be difficult for some administrators to admit that incompetent teachers have been allowed to remain on their faculties. Questions must be developed that will elicit honest responses.

Procedures

In this study, the researcher has examined the perceptions of principals in the state of Georgia with regard to incompetent teachers. As previous research and literature have shown, incompetent teachers remain in school systems despite efforts of building-level administrators to dismiss them. Determining means of minimizing their negative effects and finding ways of managing these teachers are the main foci of this inquiry.

The design of the study includes both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. It is descriptive in nature and the data were gathered by two methods. The purpose of the quantitative part of the research was to collect data from a sample of the population of 1,990 Georgia school principals. The information gathered was cross-sectional and comprised of responses to a survey administered through the mail. The purpose of the qualitative part of the research was to find more detailed information by conducting follow-up interviews with six principals. The questions asked in the

interviews were developed after the responses to the surveys were analyzed. Based on the review of related research and professional literature, a survey for principals was designed and evaluated for validity and reliability. This survey was utilized for the quantitative part of the study.

In the qualitative part of the study, initial interviews were set up with six volunteers, selected from the survey participants who indicated willingness to continue with the research and who represented both male and female principals, as well as rural, urban, and suburban schools. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit detailed information about perceptions and management of incompetent teachers (see interview questions in Appendix A). These questions were refined throughout the research effort to improve the interview process and to collect some successful as well as unsuccessful experiences with incompetent teachers from the principals.

For the quantitative focus of the study, data were analyzed through the use of mean scores on a Likert scale, percentages, and a study of comments given on the survey. The qualitative focus of the study includes an intensive analysis of the interview transcriptions. They were summarized and studied for common themes. A descriptive synopsis was utilized to answer the overarching research question and the subquestions. A collection of success stories and unsuccessful experiences from the interviewees was included in the data. It is believed these experiences will be very helpful information because of the situational nature of the teaching profession.

With this study, the researcher is continually striving to find answers to help reduce the negative effects of incompetent teachers who remain on faculties, why they remain on faculties, and how these teachers are recognized based on the perceptions of

Georgia public school principals. Also, this study indicates how pervasive incompetency exists in the teaching field in the state of Georgia and at what price incompetent teachers are kept on faculties.

Limitations

A possible limitation to this study was the inability of principals to recognize incompetent teachers on their own faculties and their dilemmas when responding to a survey regarding the existence of such teachers. Many--or at least some--may have been reluctant to admit that they have been unable to remove such teachers, even though statistics show evidence that incompetent teachers do remain in the classroom. The inconsistencies in principals' perceptions, as well as the difficulty in defining the term *incompetent*, may have also proved to be a limitation. The biases and values of the researcher entered into the interview process by the very nature of the qualitative research technique.

Delimitations

The large size of the total population of the participants in the study, principals in the state of Georgia, led to the decision to use a sample of the total population as participants in the quantitative component of the research. Two hundred principals, or 10% of the population, received the survey. The interview process, used to follow up and enhance the survey data, was limited to six participants in order to conduct a thorough investigation of each participant's viewpoints and collect both successful and unsuccessful experiences with incompetent teachers.

Definition of Key Terms

A member of a faculty, not always the principal, who has the responsibility of evaluating and determining the effectiveness of a teacher, is referred to (for this study) as the *building-level administrator*. Often, assistant principals, central office personnel, lead teachers, or other supervisors may be selected to perform evaluations of faculty members.

Level of competency describes a teacher's ability to provide positive learning experiences for his or her students (Lakey, 1976). The term is complicated and difficult to define because of the diverse perceptions of teacher evaluators.

A *marginal teacher* is one who may respond favorably to remediation efforts, with whom attempts to improve have a potentially positive effect on his or her performance. By contrast, an *incompetent teacher*, for the purpose of this study, is one whose teaching performance is not improved by remediation.

A *roadblock* is a term describing any reason that allows an incompetent teacher to remain on staff after dismissal is recommended (Lawrence, Leake, Leake, & Vachon, 1993). Reasons may include unwillingness to face a lawsuit, unsupportive supervisors, ineffective evaluation systems, and community support for an incompetent teacher. An incompetent teacher may also remain in the classroom because a shortage of teachers in a given area may prevent the ready availability of a replacement.

Summary

As Sparks (2000) notes,

Helping the ineffective teacher is one of the most important things that a principal does. After all, one must remember that much time and money has been spent in

one's becoming qualified to teach. Having to terminate a teacher is a tragedy for all concerned. (p. 22)

An administrator must remember, however, that his or her ultimate responsibility is to the students. Researchers have indicated that the effects of incompetent teachers are far reaching and profoundly negative. Although it is recognized that most beginning teachers struggle with many issues and do not automatically become master teachers upon the signing of teacher contracts, in most instances experience, good evaluation efforts, and other factors normally rectify whatever problems they encounter. Undoubtedly, the majority of teachers are competent and caring, striving to provide a good educational experience for their students (Adamson & O'Neil, 1993). It is those teachers who are not performing up to established standards and are having such a negative effect on students who must be recognized as soon as possible (Claxton, 1986).

The professional literature findings suggest that teachers who are performing below standards should be dismissed and that it is the ethical responsibility of the administrator to do so. But the roadblocks that are placed in the path of teacher dismissal, legal and otherwise, allow many ineffective teachers to remain on faculties despite the efforts of administrators. The poor teaching performance of just one teacher negatively affects many students. When an administrator supervises an incompetent teacher, he or she must discover means of negating and lessening the influences of poor teaching until dismissal or effective remediation can be accomplished.

An incompetent doctor may lose patients or misdiagnose to the point of malpractice, and an attorney may lose cases or cost his or her clients large amounts of money. In these professions, incompetents are not difficult to identify and are quickly

out of business. The teaching profession must find a way to put incompetent teachers out of business because of the potential harm to their clients or patients--students. Until the roadblocks to dismissing a teacher considered incompetent are overcome, methods of minimizing their negativity should be investigated.

Due process, teachers' rights, tenure, and other issues have been researched and discussed throughout the professional literature. Although identifying an incompetent teacher is not difficult, the definition of incompetence in the literature and in the court systems is vague and inconsistent. However, it is the issue of the incompetent teacher who is not dismissed, and that research shows has a long-reaching, negative effect on education, that needs to be addressed. How administrators cope with these teachers who remain on their faculties is a gap in available literature and is an area in need of research. The perceptions of school administrators regarding how to reduce the negative effects of incompetent teachers, why they remain on faculties, how they are recognized, and how many incompetent teachers exist are fertile grounds for study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

According to Pratt (1996), “the major mission of our public education system is to provide an environment that ensures quality learning for all children” (p. 30). In order to offer a successful learning experience, a school system must provide high-quality teachers. According to the professional literature, between 75% and 95% of teachers are good, effective, and competent. This, however, does not meet the needs of all students. The public school system has an obligation to its students, parents, community, and faculties to strive for the highest quality education (Williams, 1996). Yet incompetent teachers are, for various reasons, allowed to remain on staff. Incompetency is very difficult to address in the educational setting (Tucker, 1997).

Definition of Incompetence

Incompetent teacher is a difficult term to define. Much discussion in the literature can be found about an incompetent teacher, but the definition of incompetence varies from source to source and is not clearly elucidated. Lawrence and Vachon (1997) define incompetent teachers as those who “cannot perform their duties, or who will not perform their duties at a satisfactory level” (p. 2). Mary Jo McGrath (1993), a school board attorney, explains that incompetency cases are the most difficult of dismissal cases to win because of the subjectiveness of the issue. As the National Education Association (1957)

states in a study of tenure, when the law does not specifically define *incompetency*, wide discretion among administrators, school boards, and the courts is taken and what it means for one group may be very different from another group's interpretation. The term *incompetence*, according to Lakey (1976), "refers to a lack of educational qualifications with a lack of ability to transmit knowledge to pupils" (p. 53).

In a study of court cases in Illinois involving incompetency hearings, Robinson (1999) found "that courts have permitted a broad interpretation of incompetency, including inadequate teaching, poor discipline, physical or mental disability, and counterproductive personality traits" (p. 2). Robinson's study revealed no definitive explanation of teacher incompetency from the court system. However, he did find that teachers can be "dismissed without prior notice for irremediable behavior if such behavior causes damage to students, faculty, or school, and the damage could not have been prevented had the teacher been warned against it" (p. 14). Unfortunately, dismissal proceedings are very expensive and require much time from school boards and other faculty members.

In the article about a colleague Osmond (2000) believed to be incompetent, she could not define characteristics that described the teacher's incompetency, but could only list specific actions of the teacher that were perceived inappropriate. This is the case in many instances when attempts have been made to describe an incompetent teacher. Definitions are as vague from the teaching profession as from court cases.

Schweizer (1998) describes many cases that a reasonable person would consider to indicate incompetence, yet the teachers involved were allowed to continue in their

teaching career. An example of one case he presents is of the teacher who placed her students in a trashcan, closed it, and then kicked it. She also threatened to cut off a student's "private parts with a pair of scissors" (p. 28) before she was finally suspended. She was dismissed from that particular job, but later found another teaching job. An algebra teacher, according to Schweizer, kept her job through 3 years of dismissal procedures, even after it was shown that she was giving A's based on how much candy students brought her. He also relates the case of the teacher who did not show up for work for 6 weeks because "he was upset that someone changed grades from F to D without his consent" (p. 29), even though it was proven that he changed them himself. He was returned to his job and given back pay because he had been given no chance to remediate his behavior of staying off work before he was dismissed.

Due process for teachers is a very precise process that must be followed if a principal hopes to win a court case based on incompetence. A chance for a teacher to improve must be part of that process. Other cases as outrageous as those recounted by Schweizer (1998) above can be used to demonstrate the difficulty of defining incompetency. Most educators would agree that knowledge of subject area, classroom control, and the ability to motivate students are essential talents of a competent teacher. However, deciding to what degree a teacher lacking these skills is considered incompetent (and these are certainly not all areas of incompetency) is a difficult job (Shapiro, 1995).

A marginal teacher is not necessarily an incompetent teacher, according to Smith (1995). Marginal teachers, he believes, can be remediated and helped to improve if they so desire that improvement and put forth the effort, while incompetent teachers are those who are beyond improvement. Smith believes that working harder is not always the

solution to the problem, that some teachers are just not meant for the classroom. Remediation, administrator support, and staff development courses are not successful for incompetent teachers, but are useful tools for providing the documentation required by most courts of law. Every teacher must be given an opportunity to improve.

According to Lakey (1976), after reviewing a number of court cases, there is a minimum of “12 recurring categories of incompetency which courts have upheld as evidence” (p. 79). He stresses that most cases are not based on one category specifically, but on a combination of two or more.

These categories are as follows: lack of discipline, failure to supervise athletic contests, physical disability, lack of knowledge of subject matter, improper teaching methods, failure to keep up with the times, failure to coordinate teaching with that of other teachers, inability to get along with parents and students, inability to motivate students, failure to follow guidelines, unsatisfactory progress of pupils, and inability to get along with other teachers. (p. 79)

The degree to which courts require evidence of these characteristics, however, is often vague and inconsistent.

In a 1999 study by the present researcher (Collins), it was found that, of the teachers surveyed, 72% perceived failure to control students as the number-one characteristic of incompetence. Lack of caring for students was the second most prevalent characteristic, chosen by 32% of the group. Poor organization, poor quality of instruction, and lack of content knowledge were surprisingly listed by only 28% of the teachers surveyed. In one of the few dissertations found on the subject, Lakey (1976) listed all these characteristics as strong indicators of incompetence and offered examples of court cases that upheld each of them. Bailey (1986), a decade later, says that many incompetence hearings are not upheld in court because of First Amendment violations or

perceived improper documentation by administrators. He agrees that, because of the subjectiveness of the issue of incompetency and the situational nature of the teaching profession, it is a very difficult issue to prove without some type of outrageous behavior on the part of the teacher and even this has not always guaranteed a smooth dismissal.

Even without a definitive meaning for the term, Robert Schwartz (1997), a school attorney, says, "It's no big secret who the poor teachers are in our classrooms. Our administrators know, their fellow faculty members know, as do parents and students. In fact, the whole community knows" (p. 15). Despite knowing a teacher is incompetent, however, an administrator may find it very difficult to describe in court why he or she deems it to be true. Schwartz believes that the key to ridding a school system of an incompetent teacher is through proper and honest evaluation methods.

Definition of Competency

As with the term *incompetency*, deciding on the level of competency for a teacher is subjective and not a clearly defined process. In the *Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program: Evaluation Manual* (1989), there are three dimensions on which a teacher is evaluated. A teacher receives one of two scores: an *NI* (needs improvement) or *S* (satisfactory). An administrator usually observes a teacher for a minimum of 20 minutes and marks scores, as well as writes comments indicating his or her perceptions of a teacher's level of competency.

Teaching Task I--*Providing Instruction*--is the first dimension of the evaluation program and includes scoring for level of instruction, content development, and building for transfer of knowledge. During training sessions for evaluators, common practices and

watchwords or expressions are discussed (S. Halagen, First District Regional Educational Support Agency Staff Development Trainer, personal communication, July 1995). Certain phrases or practices are often used for scoring purposes. For example, the phrase *remember what we did yesterday*, is a signal that a teacher is building for transfer of knowledge from one lesson to another, and satisfactory marks are often given for saying that phrase in connection with a lesson. Excellent teachers are sometimes scored with an NI because they did not teach in a certain way when being observed by an evaluator.

Teaching Task II--*Assessing and Encouraging Student Progress*--is the second dimension of evaluation. It is comprised of scoring for promoting engagement, monitoring progress, responding to student performance, and supporting students. Again, well-known phrases are often used as a basis for scoring. The directions for evaluators in the *Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program: Evaluation Manual* (1989) also include the need for language "free of sarcasm and humiliating references" (p. 45). A teacher receives an automatic NI for use of sarcasm in the classroom setting.

The third dimension, Teaching Task III--*Managing the Learning Environment*--rates a teacher on his or her ability to make good use of time, management of the physical setting, and the teacher's reaction to student behavior. An administrator should be knowledgeable about activities ongoing in the classroom in order to rate a teacher properly in this dimension. A student's misbehavior is not a basis for a score of NI; it is the teacher's reaction to his or her misbehavior that is evaluated (*GTEP: Evaluation Manual*, 1989).

Five scores of NI in all dimensions during three observations requires that a teacher receive an additional scheduled observation with an opportunity to remediate.

Five scores of NI in all dimensions during three observations requires that a teacher receive an additional scheduled observation with an opportunity to remediate. Pre-conferences and post-conferences are held between the evaluator and the teacher and any deficiencies are discussed. The evaluator then conducts another unannounced observation and the teacher receives the best three of four observations as indicators of his or her ability to teach.

Too many school administrators, according to Lawrence, Leake, Leake, and Vachon (1993), rationalize their own inaction regarding teacher incompetency by casting aspersions on the evaluation system and teacher contracts. The state of Georgia, previously under the mandated *Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program* (GTEP), presently allows each school district to define its own methods of evaluation. This has allowed building-level and central office administrations to develop new methods of evaluation. No statewide program of accountability or decision to meet national standards of teaching competency has as yet been produced in Georgia, as is the case in a number of other states, according to Bradley (1999).

It must be remembered that teaching is the heart of education, and the single most important action a school system can take to improve schools is to strengthen teaching. According to Bradley (1999), as many as 30 states are offering incentives for teachers to seek national certification. Bender and Cozic (1992) believe that offering national certification standards for teachers will help improve the quality of both teaching and learning. They also think that the incentives, such as being certified nationally and pay increases, will assist in keeping good teachers in the field of teaching. The state of

Georgia offers a 10% raise in pay for those teachers receiving national certification (Nolan, 2000).

Effects of Incompetent Teachers

The negative effect of an incompetent teacher can be found both in student performance and emotional problems, as well as faculty morale and in monetary costs of dismissal proceedings. “Research shows poor teaching has terrible, lasting effects on student achievement” (Jones, 1997, p. 21). Jones refers to a study by William Sanders at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, which tracked student achievement test scores. Students in poor teachers’ classes were still showing the negative effects of an ineffective teacher 3 or 4 years after the fact. The trend in education to hold faculties accountable for gains in student achievement is growing rapidly in popularity. School administrators must key in to leadership responsibilities and make teacher performance a priority. Several states, including Georgia, are making principals increasingly accountable for student achievement in their schools and even one poorly performing teacher can have an adverse effect on that achievement (Schwartz, 1997).

At a 5% rate of poor teachers in a high school of 300, Schwartz (1997) laments the negative effect of approximately 15 teachers on an average of each one’s 120 students per day (p. 15). McGrath (1993) finds that 10% of the teacher workforce is incompetent, which, if accurate, would double Schwartz’s calculations. She says, “The cost of teacher incompetence and poor performance is staggering. It results in decreased student achievement, low teacher morale, diminished confidence toward schools, teacher and administrator liability, and increased litigation” (p. 30). Unfortunately, according to

Glastris (1997), the weakest teachers usually have a propensity to end up with the most needy students because of the tendency of the parents of the low-performing students to be those who normally do not complain. Also, teachers with seniority typically receive the highest level of classes or the most able students. New teachers are often given the most difficult students to teach because of this outdated system of scheduling.

Although the costs of student achievement and success may be difficult and time consuming to demonstrate and explain, the monetary costs of dismissing an ineffective teacher are easily measured. “An effort to oust a tenured San Diego teacher took a decade and cost the school district nearly \$500,000 in legal fees. In the state of Florida, the average cost of dismissal for an incompetent teacher is \$60,000” (Glastris, 1997, p. 32). Schweizer (1998) relates horror stories of dismissing a teacher who was caught in the nude with one of her students whose case took 3 years and cost approximately \$100,000, and, in New York, the average uncontested (in court) dismissal cost \$112,000, with a contested case averaging about \$300,000. Illinois averages a 3-year effort with a cost of \$70,000 or more.

Some alternatives to dismissal are often utilized before an administrator will opt to fight the uphill battle of documenting and attempting to prove incompetence in order to dismiss a teacher. According to Nobles (2000), three of those options are changing a teacher’s position, transferring a teacher, or attempting to help the teacher improve his or her performance through intensive remediation. These alternatives, however, affect other faculty members and students, as well as a school budget, and may not always be viable options.

In reaching a decision about nonrenewing a teacher's certificate, Lemon and Randklev (1990) offer the following advice:

You have to weigh the seriousness of the problem, the prospects for improvement, and the productivity of efforts and energies already expended on behalf of the teacher against the potential loss of education of the students who will be served by that teacher in the coming year. (p. 45)

The welfare and education of his or her students should be the number-one priority of an administrator. As Sewell (1999) eloquently expresses the idea,

The public or private school educator who has worked long enough to be nonprobationary is not freed of the responsibility to teach (or administrate) with a passion for excellence, mindful of the student and the needs of the society in which that student must live and work. (p. 3)

The effect of even one incompetent teacher in a school can be profound. As confirmed by Glastris (1997), when an incompetent teacher is allowed to remain on staff, it eventually demoralizes good teachers. It indicates their hard work and dedication are not appreciated by the administration, as there are seemingly no consequences for poor performance. Interestingly, "peer teachers appear more willing than administrators to terminate incompetent teachers" (Birk, 1995, p. 49). Of course, they are often not aware of court decisions, due process laws, or political interests with which an administrator must cope.

Roadblocks to Dismissal

Many administrative roadblocks to teacher dismissal are discussed in the professional literature. Tenure is a topic presently much in the news. Many states are changing tenure laws or attempting to abolish tenure for teachers (Lemon & Randklev, 1990). Even in 1973, the American Association of School Administrators recognized

that “tenure laws have operated so unsatisfactorily, often protecting weak teachers and incompetent administrators, that supporters of the concept of tenure are becoming very scarce” (p. 10).

In 1995, school administrators in Georgia lost the ability to gain tenure, yet they remain under the protection of the Fair Dismissal Act. This change has resulted in many school administrators seeking multiple-year contracts, according to Elizabeth Zipperer, Personnel Director of Evans County Schools (personal communication, May 2001). Tenure offers holding power, job security, due process, and an opportunity for continued growth. Bridges (1990) says, “the fundamental purpose behind tenure is to protect adequate and competent teachers from arbitrary and unreasonable dismissal by school boards” (p. 12). Before state tenure laws, teachers served at the discretion of school boards. Their power to dismiss was unchecked and some boards engaged in questionable practices. Tenure is a legal barrier to such practices (p. 14).

Ann Nolan (2000) of the Georgia Department of Education summarized Georgia’s House Bill 1187, now known as the *A-Plus Education Reform Act*. Some of the teacher requirements drastically affect tenure in the state of Georgia. Nolan explains, “Teachers have the right to request and receive written notice stating why their contract is not renewed” (p. 5). This reform represents a sweeping change from the previous policy requiring no reason to be given for nonrenewal of a nontenured teacher. However, some other changes, such as “teachers will not advance a step on the salary schedule if they receive an unsatisfactory evaluation” and “a person who has received two unsatisfactory annual performance evaluations in a 5-year period shall not be entitled to a renewable certificate” (p. 5), appear to assist administrators in avoiding some of the political pitfalls

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problems arise with a tenured teacher, union or not, the principal has several obligations: “(a) to determine the extent and cause of the problems, (b) to devise a remediation strategy, (c) to respect the teacher’s due process rights, and (d) to maintain written documentation” (p. 1).

As clear as these steps are, the American Association of School Administrators (1973) contends that “many administrators have been discouraged from attempting to evaluate and apply the results to decisions about retention of teachers after the probationary period because of a feeling of futility” (p. 13). Many administrators believe that incompetence is too vague a term to prove in court and “why bother with evaluation?” (p. 14). Only when teachers can be charged with immorality or have “committed some overt act of malfeasance” (p. 14) is dismissal likely to happen without extravagant legal fees and a massive amount of the administrator’s time. Even then there is no guarantee that much time and money will not be required.

Portin, Shen, and Williams (1998) point out that principals “are approaching the limits of the amount of time they can dedicate to the job [of evaluating teachers]. In addition to the time constraints, the principals, because of external priorities, are increasingly becoming managers rather than instructional leaders” (p. 1). The school leader is the principal, and the role that he or she takes in the instructional process sets the climate for the faculty. Instructional leadership is the single most important aspect of an administrator’s job; yet more and more time is being given over to management roles instead of leadership roles.

Because management tasks are often more explicit, not complying with them becomes very visible to one’s district administrators. Some management tasks can also have legal consequences. As a result, principals very often give high priority

to attending to managerial responsibilities, many times at the expense of leadership responsibilities. There is simply not enough time to do both. (Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998, p. 6)

Because of the difficulty of removing an incompetent teacher from a faculty as a result of tenure, union intervention, and nonsupport from superintendents or boards of education because of fear of lawsuits, Marczely (1998) observes that “administrators have found a dangerous new level of tolerance for mediocre and marginal teacher performance” (p. 89). Many times an administrator inherits an incompetent teacher or has one transferred to his or her faculty by the superintendent. Fuhr (1993) asks, “What do you do with marginal teachers?,” and then points out, “You can’t ignore them. Ignoring them usually means their performance will get worse” (p. 27). As Scriven (1997) notes, the costs of keeping an incompetent teacher far outweigh the costs of dismissing one. There is too much at stake in a child’s educational process to allow a teacher to perform poorly.

According to Osmond (2000), teachers are reluctant to report incompetent colleagues to their principals or any other supervisor because they believe it will not improve the situation. Teachers understand that no teacher can be dismissed without massive amounts of documentation or his or her having committed an act so reprehensible it requires immediate dismissal. Talk among teachers about an incompetent colleague seldom reaches the person who needs to hear it. Osmond (2000) calls this the “conspiracy of silence around bad teachers” (p. 51).

The court system has not yet established clear guidelines “for claims that educational malpractice should be or is a cause of action” (Khan, 1996, p. 279), but this may not always be the case. Incompetent teachers who remain on faculties are possible

attractors of litigation from many sources. Students and parents deserve the best possible educational opportunities available, but are many times unaware of what avenues are open to them.

A problem administrators are discovering more and more often is the shortage of teachers available to replace an incompetent teacher once dismissal is attained. Bondi and Trowbridge (1999) illustrate the growing dilemma with an example in Detroit where “about 10% of the district’s 8400 classrooms are taught by substitutes or teachers with emergency certifications” (p. 2). Many principals are struggling to fill the vacancies that occur through retirement or other resignations, much less openings caused by dismissals of certified teachers. If an abundance of qualified replacements were available, principals would more readily work toward dismissals of unfit teachers. Attracting high-quality people to the teaching profession is becoming more difficult as salaries for other professions, such as law or medicine, are 50% to 75% higher than for the teaching profession (Chaddock, 1998). Chaddock also reports that the United States Department of Education estimates that, over the next decade, 2 million new teachers will be needed to replace a high number of upcoming retirees, fill new positions resulting from mandated smaller class sizes and changes in curriculum, and replace other teachers leaving the profession. Schools of education are not graduating the numbers that will be needed, providing even more job security for poorly performing teachers.

Pervasiveness of Teacher Incompetence

According to Ellis (1994), who surveyed many parents and administrators, incompetence in the teaching profession has become a major concern. He found that

45% of parents polled in California thought there were teachers in their child's school system who needed to be fired. When administrators were polled, they were asked to estimate the number of unsatisfactory teachers and they gave figures ranging from 5% to 25% of the teaching profession (Ellis, 1994).

The percentages of incompetent teachers varies in the research, but, as Schwartz (1997) points out, each incompetent teacher may influence up to 120 students a day and one poorly performing teacher is too many (p. 15). Ward (1995) conducted a survey of superintendents over a 3-year period. He determined that superintendents believe about 3.3% of nontenured teachers are not performing at an acceptable level, with a dismissal rate of 2.7%. Among tenured teachers, however, approximately 4.1% need to be dismissed for inadequate teaching, with an actual dismissal rate of 0.15%. This indicates that only 1 out of every 27 tenured teachers who are performing poorly in the classroom is terminated (p. 18). McGrath (1993), however, believes that the overall percentage of the teacher work force that is incompetent is more like 10% (p. 30). This is closer to Fuhr's (1993) estimate that "85% to 90% of teachers are doing an excellent job" (p. 28).

In relative numbers, VanSciver (1990) points out that, in the state of Delaware, in which 5,850 teachers were employed during the 1989-1990 school year, only 4 tenured teachers were dismissed. If one considers the lower estimations of 4% of incompetence overall, this means that approximately 230 teachers who needed to be dismissed were allowed to keep their positions, just in the state of Delaware alone.

Bridges (1990), who has done extensive research on this subject, estimates that the true figure of incompetence lies somewhere between 5% and 15%. Much of the research conducted agrees with this range. McGrath (1993) points out, "Failure to take

action results in decreased student achievement, low teacher morale, diminished confidence toward schools, teacher and administrative liability, and increased litigation” (p. 30). As noted previously, one incompetent teacher is too many to ignore.

Administrators' Management of Incompetent Teachers

Olson (1999) relates, “It’s a very American set of ideas: Take responsibility for your actions. Focus on results. And reap--or rue--the consequences. And these days, it can all be summed up in one word: accountability” (p. 1). Administrators must be responsible for evaluating and identifying incompetent teachers. They must then make a decision if remediation is possible or if dismissal is necessary. As Waitroob (1995b) points out, this is a very time-consuming and much disliked process.

Allen, LeBlanc, and Nichols (1997) think typical teacher evaluation systems result in almost no consequences for poor performance. An administrator spends a tremendous amount of time with efforts to remediate and improve a teacher’s performance that usually results in the administrator doing more work than the teacher being evaluated. It is small wonder that administrators have second thoughts about attempting dismissals for incompetence. According to DeMitchell (1995), expectations for teachers must be clearly communicated and, when those are not met, the teachers must be given a chance for remediation before any consequences, such as an unsatisfactory evaluation, can be given. Anita Waitroob (1995a), a school attorney, sums up the problem: “Remediating a problem teacher is like trying to plug a leaky dike. Once the administrator plugs one aspect of problem performance, new leaks appear” (p. 38). Remediation just may not be helpful with some teachers.

“Singling out teachers for poor performance is a tricky proposition for which few states have much stomach” (Olson, 1999, p. 2). Tennessee has a new program, the Value-Added Assessment System, that links student achievement to teacher performance. It is used primarily to assist administrators in recommending professional development strategies for teachers. It is not designed to be punitive and is used strictly for remediation purposes.

Schrag (1995) suggests allowing, or even requiring, uninspiring and ineffective teachers to observe their colleagues who are recognized as being innovative and motivating. Observing what is possible and how others reach children and inspire them to learn may be one of the keys to improvement. He also suggests having colleagues observe an incompetent teacher and make suggestions and give constructive criticism toward improvement. Shawn Carpenter (1998), the president of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators in 1998 and 1999, agrees with this concept. He believes that “trying new materials and methods and sharing them with your colleagues can be professionally rewarding and stimulating” (p. 2). Peer remediation, although it does take time to arrange, may help free an administrator’s time spent in observations and will offer another viewpoint on a teacher’s abilities.

Beginning with the 1997-1998 school year, the Texas school system requires administrators to base teacher evaluations, in part, on the performance of their students. However, the *Professional Development and Appraisal System*, as it is called, looks at total school performance, not individual teacher progress. The program is “designed to encourage collaboration in schools and cut down on the infighting among teachers that individual ratings can inspire” (Olson, 1999, p. 2).

Adamson and O'Neil (1993) describe their philosophy of what should be done with ineffective teachers. They suggest using a committee to support administrators and make certain that due process rights are followed. This committee is formed to advise administrators and to help ensure that a teacher's problem is not a matter of politics or personality. According to Adamson and O'Neil, teacher-administrator relationships have improved with the use of supportive committees.

Phay (1972) also recommended forming a committee, but his committee was one to set up procedures for writing policy for dismissal or demotion. It would write policy that would ensure that due process rights for all faculty members were guaranteed and would meet all tenure requirements, which, during the year the article was written, went into effect in Phay's state of North Carolina. Phay put forth the idea that each member of the faculty should receive a copy of the policy after it was completed and approved by his or her board of education.

Because supervision is such an essential part of an administrator's responsibilities, it is imperative that he or she stay informed on new legislation and case law which affects teachers' rights and gives them a basis for lawsuits (Jurenas, 1993). Ethical standards must also be maintained. Failure to stay well-versed on legislation and case law could mean the difference between keeping an ineffective teacher on staff or dismissal. The administrator must take this responsibility seriously (Marczely, 1998).

Summary

The literature suggests that teachers who are performing below standard should be dismissed and that it is the ethical responsibility of the administrator to do so. But the

roadblocks that are placed in the path of teacher dismissal, legal and otherwise, cause many ineffective teachers to remain on faculties, regardless of the efforts of administrators. Even defining the term *incompetent* has proven to be a difficult matter. The poor teaching performance of just one teacher negatively affects many students. When an administrator supervises an incompetent teacher, he or she must discover means of negating and lessening the influences of poor teaching until dismissal or effective remediation can be accomplished.

The court systems have been vague about defining incompetency when a board of education attempts to terminate a teacher for that reason (Bridges, 1990). Because of the difficulty and costs of legal conflicts, many school systems have been reluctant to dismiss teachers for incompetency, instead using other reasons, or leaving the teacher on staff to damage the educational process of many students even further. However unethical the practice may be, administrators often find the problem of dismissing an incompetent, tenured teacher to be an insurmountable and frustrating task and choose not to attempt it (Tucker, 1997).

Due process, teachers' rights, tenure, and other issues are often researched and discussed. It is the issue of the incompetent teacher who is not dismissed, and that research shows has a long-reaching, negative effect on education, that needs to be addressed. How administrators work with these teachers who remain on their faculties is difficult to find in available literature. Strategies for working with poor teachers until the school year is over or until dismissal can be attained and ways to minimize their negative

effects on students is a deficient area in research; yet, as education continues to evolve with new ideas and too few available teachers, it is an area of great concern.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Principals and teachers are being held increasingly accountable for student achievement. Every effort should be made to increase the chances of student success in school and in the global community. In this study, the researcher has examined the perceptions of principals in the state of Georgia in regard to incompetent teachers, a deterrent to student achievement. As previous research and literature have shown, incompetent teachers remain in school systems despite efforts of building-level administrators to dismiss them. Determining means of minimizing their negative effect, and finding strategies for coping with these teachers, is the main focus of this inquiry.

Research Questions

The study was intended to answer the major question: *How do principals manage incompetent teachers who have evaded dismissal and are remaining in classrooms under their supervision?* In order to address this issue, the following areas of teacher incompetency, as perceived by Georgia principals, have been investigated:

1. What characteristics of teachers do principals perceive as indicative of incompetency?
2. What do principals perceive as the negative effects of incompetent teachers?
3. What roadblocks to dismissal of incompetent teachers do principals most frequently encounter?

4. What percentage of teachers under their supervision do principals believe are truly incompetent?
5. Are there differences in the perceptions of principals based on demographic and biographic factors regarding incompetent teachers?
6. What leadership strategies do principals employ to minimize the negative effects of incompetent teachers who remain on faculties regardless of the need or effort to dismiss?

Research Design

The design of the study is both quantitative and qualitative. It is descriptive in nature and the data were gathered both quantitatively and qualitatively. The purpose of the quantitative study was to collect data regarding principals' perceptions of incompetent teachers and to gather information to help recognize such teachers. The data collected are cross-sectional form surveys administered through the mail. Specific characteristics as well as the perceived numbers of incompetent teachers were a portion of the information gathered on the surveys. Principals were also asked to respond to questions about the negative effects of those teachers and what strategies they have used to minimize the effects and their perceptions about roadblocks to dismissal of incompetent teachers. Using coded surveys, a comparison was made among different school levels and locations as well as principals' demographics to determine if there are significant differences in the perceptions of the principals. The purpose of the qualitative part of the research was to find more detailed information about how incompetent teachers were perceived and managed by principals.

On the survey, the participants were given the opportunity to respond to a question regarding their willingness to contribute to the research during an interview. The six interviewees were selected from the volunteer group, based on sex and school level. The questions asked in the interviews were developed after the surveys were returned and analyzed (see interview questions in Appendix A). Approval to utilize human subjects in the research was obtained from Georgia Southern University's Institutional Review Board.

Participants

The participants for the study are a sample of the total population of 1,990 Georgia school principals. About 10% of the population, or 200 principals, were randomly selected to receive surveys. The participants were chosen from a total list of schools in the state of Georgia, selecting first each fifth elementary school principal, then each fifth middle school principal, and, finally, each fifth high school principal, until there were 200 school principals in the sample. A target was set of 60%, or 120, surveys to be returned in order to generalize results to the population. Follow-up interviews were conducted with six principals, representative of both large and small schools in urban and rural areas of the state of Georgia. Two from each school level (high, middle, and elementary), a male and a female, were selected.

Data Collection

Based on the review of related literature, a survey was designed and evaluated for validity and reliability by the researcher. This survey was used for the quantitative part of the study. An earlier check of the survey with 36 participants was used to find a

reliability coefficient of .72. Another pilot study with 15 principals was conducted to test the validity by using the survey in Appendix B. After the instrument was refined and coded, it was mailed to the 200 randomly selected principals in the state of Georgia. A self-addressed stamped envelope was provided for ease of return. The surveys and envelopes were coded by placing a number on the return envelope that matched a master list of addresses in order to determine which surveys had been returned. Complete confidentiality was maintained with the results. After a 2-week interval, a follow-up copy of the survey was mailed to those principals who had not yet responded so that the acceptable target number of returns was reached. The validity and reliability of the data gathered was further confirmed by the qualitative interview process.

The qualitative component of the research consisted of follow-up interviews with six of the respondents who indicated their willingness to participate further in the study. The answers received from the demographic questions on the survey helped determine the six participants so that each level of school and gender of principal could be represented in the interview process. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit detailed information about perceptions and management of incompetent teachers from the principals. These interviews were approximately 30 to 45 minutes in length and the questions were developed from the survey responses, but asked for much more detail in their answers. An open-ended question format was used to draw out the most comprehensive answers possible. Transcriptions of the interviews were returned to participants for clarification and verification of information. Throughout the interview process questions were refined to improve the quality of the data gathered and to collect

some successful and unsuccessful accounts of working with incompetent teachers from the participating principals.

Survey Instrument and Quantitative Data Analysis

Survey data collected fell into five categories: (a) Likert-scale ratings from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* regarding parallel statements about incompetent teachers, (b) the numbers of perceived incompetent teachers and of total faculty members, (c) a top-five ranking of characteristics of incompetent teachers, (d) a top-five ranking of management techniques, and (e) six demographic questions.

The Likert-scale ratings were used to determine principals' general perceptions of incompetent teachers and their effects on a school as well as reasons why these teachers remained on faculties. These data were analyzed by determining means and standard deviations. Responses were also compared by means of an analysis of variance with demographic categories to determine if there were any significant differences.

The total number of teachers on a faculty and the number of such teachers perceived to be incompetent were used to determine the percentage of incompetent teachers statewide. The researcher believes the survey answers are generalizable to the state of Georgia and update previous research.

The 11 characteristics of teacher incompetency most frequently found in the professional literature were listed on the survey. Participants were asked to choose the top five characteristics and rank those five in order of importance in defining incompetency. This was not only to assist the researcher to refine a description of an incompetent teacher but also to help establish the reliability of parts of the survey. An

open-ended possibility, "other," was listed as number 12 allowing a respondent to fill in a characteristic he or she believed should be included. The responses were used to compute a weighted value and determine which of the characteristics were rated higher than others.

The next section included seven management techniques used to work with an incompetent teacher. The participant was also given an opportunity to add an additional technique not included in the list. Responding principals were asked to choose the top five and rank them by effectiveness. These were also used to compute a weighted value.

The last type of question on the survey was demographic in nature. At the end, the respondent was asked if he or she would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview process and if he or she would like to receive a copy of the results. The demographic information was employed to select a representative group of six volunteers for the interview process. The information collected in this section was also used to formulate questions for interviewees.

Interview Protocol and Qualitative Data Analysis

After the survey results were analyzed and summarized, interview questions were developed (questions are found in Appendix A). Using the demographic information, six participants representing high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools were chosen for the interview process. Also, the sex of the principals and the location were considered. The final selection criteria depended on the number of surveys returned in which the respondents expressed an interest in continuing in the study as an interview prospect.

Interviews were set up for approximately 30 to 45 minutes and each session was recorded. During these interviews, each principal was asked to share any success stories he or she had regarding experiences with an incompetent teacher. He or she was then asked to relate an unsuccessful experience. The transcripts were returned to the interviewees for any clarifications of answers or additional information. Changes were made according to the interviewees' concerns. Patterns or similar experiences were analyzed and information that may be generalizable to any educational setting was noted. A descriptive summary of the interviews was composed and a collection of the shared experiences of principals was included in the results of the research.

Interviewees were randomly assigned identifying numbers from I-1 to I-6. These numbers were used to cite confidentially from interview transcripts. Excerpts from the interviews were utilized to support survey data. Successful and unsuccessful attempts at working with particular incompetent teachers, as related by principals during the interviews, were also included in the data. These experiences demonstrate the situational nature of working with incompetent teachers.

Summary

The study demonstrated that an administrator who supervises an incompetent teacher is in a difficult situation. Many times dismissal is not feasible at least until the end of a school year or until a massive amount of documentation has been gathered. The negative effects of these teachers must be minimized. There is a large body of literature on dismissal proceedings and due process rights of teachers, but very little on coping with incompetent teachers who remain employed as teachers for various reasons.

In this study, the researcher attempted to offer a collection of experiences and guidance for working with teachers who have a harmful effect on any part of students' school environment. While collecting this essential information, the researcher also endeavored to determine a composite description of an incompetent teacher, what percentage of teachers were considered incompetent, and what roadblocks principals faced when attempting dismissal proceedings. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in an attempt to capture the scope as well as the depth of the data collected.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

In order to understand the concept of an incompetent teacher better, both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry were employed by the researcher for this study. Using a two-phase design, the researcher explored the perceptions of principals about incompetent teachers by a mail-out survey. This phase was intended to provide quantitative answers to the research questions. Some of the questions were specific and some more general.

The second phase was qualitative, which consisted of interviews with six principals at different levels and school settings. The intent of the interviews was to find more specific answers to the overarching research question regarding how principals manage incompetent teachers who have, for whatever reasons, been allowed to remain in teaching. The findings from the interviews were intended to expand on the results of the surveys, since the research conclusions were based on human perceptions and, therefore, cover many facets of the incompetency. In order to gain further insights, each interview participant was asked to share successful and unsuccessful experiences when working with incompetent teachers.

Research Questions

The study, again, was intended to answer the major question: *How do principals manage incompetent teachers who have evaded dismissal and remain in classrooms*

under their supervision? In order to address this issue, the following areas of teacher incompetency, as perceived by Georgia principals, have been investigated:

1. What characteristics of teachers do principals perceive as indicative of incompetency?
2. What do principals perceive as the negative effects of incompetent teachers?
3. What roadblocks to dismissal of incompetent teachers do principals most frequently encounter?
4. What percentage of teachers under their supervision do principals believe are truly incompetent?
5. Are there differences in the perceptions of principals based on demographic and biographic factors regarding incompetent teachers?
6. What leadership strategies do principals employ to minimize the negative effects of incompetent teachers who remain on faculties regardless of the need or effort to dismiss?

Quantitative (survey) data were gathered to address each research question, whereas qualitative (interview) data were collected to enhance the findings, more fully answering the overarching question and some of the subquestions.

Demographic Data

Biographic and demographic data were collected on the survey instrument. These data are presented in the following section. Profiles of the six respondents selected for the qualitative--or interview--phase of the study are also summarized.

Survey Respondents

The respondents to the survey were asked to answer six demographic questions. Table 1 is a summary of the responses to the demographic questions by actual numbers and percentages of total participants. The six questions requested information on the sex (43.7% male, 56.3% female) and race (21.4% black, 76.2% white, 1.6% Hispanic, 0.8% other) of the person responding. There was only one person who chose the *other* choice for race, but the respondent did not specify which race he or she represented in the space offered for that purpose. The largest percentage (29.4%) of participating principals had between 6 and 10 years experience in administration, but 55.6% reported over 20 total years in education. One individual stated that he or she had only 1 to 2 years of experience in education; either this principal misunderstood the survey item or he or she is one of the few principals in the state of Georgia who has entered the profession through an alternative route, with prior administrative experience in business or the military.

The levels of school were represented by elementary, 42.9%; middle, 16.7%; and high schools, 40.5%. High school principals responded to the survey at a proportionally higher rate than did their elementary and middle school counterparts. Principals from schools in all settings took part in the study: mostly urban, 19.0%; mostly suburban, 28.6%; and mostly rural/small town, 52.4%.

The demographic information was employed to determine if significant differences ($p < .05$) were found among the categories of attributes in the responses to the Likert-scale items on page 1 of the survey. Depending on the research question(s) to which the information is related, any significant differences are recorded in this chapter.

Table 1

Demographic Summary of 126 Survey Respondents

Attribute	Number	Percent
Sex		
Male	55	43.7
Female	71	56.3
Race		
Black	27	21.4
White	96	76.2
Hispanic	2	1.6
Other	1	0.8
Years of Administrative Experience		
1-2 years	14	11.1
3-5 years	20	15.9
6-10 years	37	29.4
11-15 years	24	19.0
16-20 years	11	8.7
Over 20 years	20	15.9
Total Years in Education		
1-2 years	1	0.8
3-5 years	1	0.8
6-10 years	10	7.9
11-15 years	22	17.5
16-20 years	22	17.5
Over 20 years	70	55.6
Level of School		
Elementary	54	42.9
Middle	21	16.7
High	51	40.5
School Setting		
Mostly Urban	24	19.0
Mostly Suburban	36	28.6
Mostly Rural/Small Town	66	52.4

Interviewees

A smaller number than expected, only 15 principals who returned the survey indicated they would be interested in participating in the interview process. Attempts were made to contact all six of the males and one from each level of school was eventually found to interview. Of the nine females, from the first six contacted, one was located at each school level. The demographics of the interview participants are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Information About Interview Participants

Sex	Race	Years of Administrative Experience	Level of school	School Setting
Male	White	5	Elementary	Suburban
Female	White	15	Elementary	Rural
Male	White	20	Middle	Rural
Female	Black	12	Middle	Rural
Male	Black	16	High	Suburban
Female	White	10	High	Rural

In order to interview both male and female participants at each school level, it was necessary for both middle schools to have a rural setting. The small number of volunteers for the interview process created some difficulty in having all school settings represented, but the researcher believed the final group to be diverse.

Characteristics of Incompetent Teachers

Question number 11, part A, on the survey relates to research subquestion 1: *What characteristics do principals perceive as being indicative of incompetent teachers?* This section listed 11 characteristics of incompetent teachers. The participants were asked to rank the top five characteristics, indicating incompetency in order of importance to them. Number 12 on the list was included as *other* and a blank space was offered for the responding principal to add any characteristic he or she found to be omitted from the choices. The list of characteristics drawn from the literature and included in the survey were: (a) failure to control students, (b) unprofessional appearance of classroom, (c) excessive absences, (d) lack of caring for students, (e) poorly organized lesson plans and records, (f) unfair evaluation of student work, (g) poor quality of instruction, (h) lack of knowledge of learning styles, (i) lack of content knowledge, (j) poor attitude, (k) lack of knowledge of growth and development of students/youth, and (l) other.

Table 3 summarizes the weighted values of each characteristic. The number of times it was chosen for the top five and the order in which it was ranked was considered. For each characteristic, weighted values were computed (first place receiving a value of 5, second a 4, third a 3, fourth a 2, and fifth a value of 1), and the results were listed in order by weighted value, with the highest value first. The number of respondents who

chose the characteristic was also listed. In the one instance where two items had the same weighted values (“excessive absences” and “lack of knowledge of learning styles”), “excessive absences” is listed before “lack of knowledge of learning styles” because it was named as a top-five selection by more respondents (43 and 40, respectively).

The top five characteristics, in ranked order by percentages chosen, were: poor quality of instruction, 89.6%; failure to control students, 82.5%; lack of content knowledge, 64.3%; poorly organized lesson plans and records, 54.7%; and lack of caring for students, 51.6%. It seems prudent to mention the characteristic of poor attitude, as it was selected by 46.3%, not far below the fifth, yet well above the seventh most chosen, lack of knowledge of learning styles, 32.5%. As is summarized in Table 3, the order is somewhat different when using the weighted values. Some characteristics were chosen more often than others, but not as highly rated.

“Poor quality of instruction” was ranked highest in value (3.96), having been selected by 9 out of 10 respondents, 55 of whom ranked it first. The 64.3% of survey participants who perceived “lack of content knowledge” to be one of their top-five characteristics of incompetent teachers ranked it in second place (weighted value of 3.27). The third ranked item, “failure to control students,” with a similar weighted value (3.26), was picked by substantially more respondents (104, or 82.4%) among their top five choices. The alternative of “lack of caring for students” was not chosen for the top five characteristics of an incompetent teacher quite as many times (65) as “poorly organized lesson plans and records” (69), but it received a slightly higher weighted value

(2.80 rather than 2.54). The characteristic “poor attitude” was sixth in number chosen for the top five, but was ninth in weighted value of 2.37.

Table 3

Characteristics of Incompetent Teachers: Weighted Values as Ranked by 126 Survey Respondents

Characteristic	Number Selecting (Percent)	Weighted Value
1. Poor quality of instruction	113 (89.7)	3.96
2. Lack of content knowledge	81 (64.3)	3.27
3. Failure to control students	104 (82.5)	3.26
4. Lack of caring for students	65 (51.5)	2.80
5. Poorly organized lesson plans and records	69 (54.7)	2.54
6. Excessive absences	43 (34.1)	2.53
7. Lack of knowledge of learning styles	40 (31.7)	2.53
8. Unfair evaluation of student work	27 (21.4)	2.41
9. Poor attitude	57 (45.2)	2.37
10. Lack of knowledge of growth and development of children/youth	15 (11.9)	2.10
11. Unprofessional appearance of classroom	7 (5.5)	2.00

Four additional characteristics were inserted, utilizing the open-ended option. Two listed “unprofessional conduct” (one clarified this by adding “backstabbing” as an aside) and another included “inability to actively involve students in learning.” One principal wrote in “lack of active teaching/instruction from bell to bell, or wasted instructional time.” Also, one participant, using the number 12 option, added “no classroom discipline,” which the researcher tallied with the existing survey item “failure to control students.”

The interview question, “What characteristics indicate to you a teacher is incompetent?,” garnered a list of characteristics, not unlike the list from the survey, but with some new wording. Five out of six interview participants answered first, “no classroom control.” Two of them added that lack of classroom discipline stems from other problems, not the other way around. Characteristics brought out in the interviews were: (a) classroom control problems, (b) not caring for children, (c) excessive absences, (d) inability to relate to children, (e) apathy or lack of concern about improving, (f) lack of organizational skills or lack of planning, (g) inability to impart knowledge, (h) inability to change with the times, (i) lack of focus or dedication, (j) lack of esprit d’corps, and (k) lack of content/curriculum knowledge.

“Inability to relate to children” was talked about by four of the six participants; apathy, or “lack of motivation to improve,” by two; “no organization” by two; and “excessive absences” by two. One participant, I-5, was asked specifically about “lack of content knowledge,” because it was so often chosen on the survey and because this respondent had also listed it, but did not bring it out during the questions about the characteristics. I-5 said:

I know you have to know what you are talking about and teaching, but I think a good teacher can teach most any subject. You can be a facilitator in the classroom and let the children find the knowledge. They are getting better and better at that with all the technology available today. Like I said, a good teacher can teach anything. Except maybe I couldn’t teach trigonometry, I guess, but I could give it a whirl. I could likely do a better job, just because I can relate to most kids, than a brilliant trigonometrist, for lack of a better word, who has no clue about his or her students.

“Excessive absences” was mentioned by two principals, to refer to those teachers who abuse the system and were absent constantly. An explanation was given to describe

what was meant about “not being able to change with the times.” One interviewee (I-2) said, “Some teachers who may have been good teachers years ago have become almost incompetent because they do not see the need for change.”

The interview participants found it difficult, some said impossible, to define an incompetent teacher because such teachers are incompetent to varied degrees in a number of areas. A list of characteristics did not effectively describe any incompetent teacher, but the incompetent teacher’s characteristics helped clarify the items on the list. Incompetency was described by an individual teacher’s weaknesses.

Negative Effects of Incompetent Teachers

On page 1 of the survey, Likert-scale statements, answered on a scale of 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*), were presented to the participants. Statements 1, 2, 7, and 8 relate to research subquestion 2, *What do principals perceive as the negative effects of incompetent teachers?* Using SPSS 8.0 Summarize and Descriptives commands, the mean and range for each statement was determined. Table 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics for each relevant statement. The column heading for the statements used in Table 4 includes a stem that goes before each statement below it. The minimum and maximum show the range of selection from participants for the Likert scale, and the mean column is the calculated mean for all 126 selections. All respondents either *agreed* (4) or *strongly agreed* (5) that an incompetent teacher has a negative effect on student achievement in his or her class. The mean results for the last three statements were well within the same range; however, there were some respondents who chose

strongly disagree for each one of the statements, as indicated by the minimum numbers shown in the table.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Statements 1, 2, 7, and 8

Statement: An incompetent teacher has a negative effect . . .	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
on student achievement in his or her class	4.00	5.00	4.8571
on his or her students' overall performance outside of his or her classroom	1.00	5.00	4.0952
on his or her colleagues	1.00	5.00	4.2778
on a school's environment	1.00	5.00	4.4048

The answers to this question were scattered throughout the interview, intermixed with several conversations. Six clear thoughts about the negative effects of incompetent teachers were noted and described in the following list: (a) adds to the work load of colleagues and administration, (b) lowers teacher morale, (c) sets the stage for accidents or fights to happen in an uncontrolled classroom, (d) lowers self-esteem of students, (e) lowers standards of the school, and (f) lowers the quality of education for students.

One principal, I-2, shared a perception of the effect of an incompetent teacher: "An incompetent teacher can be like a burr in the skin and, if something is not done, it will infect the whole being." Another principal, I-4, covered several areas of the negative effects of incompetent teachers with the following statement:

Teachers know when one of their colleagues is weak in the classroom, or weak in their extracurricular duties . . . you know what I mean, bus duty, hall duty, and so on. If this is not addressed, it can certainly lower morale and have a negative effect on the performance of the rest of the faculty. I do not, as I have seen done in the past, cover up for one teacher by giving their work to another. That would bring down morale in a hurry.

Interviewees agreed that an incompetent teacher certainly has an overall negative effect on a school, but it depended on the area of incompetency as to the degree and nature of those effects. The area of incompetency also determined who was affected by the incompetent teacher, the students or the remainder of the faculty.

Roadblocks to Dismissal

Statements 3 and 4 on the Likert scale section of the survey are related to subquestion 3, *What roadblocks to dismissal of incompetent teachers do principals most frequently encounter?* Table 5 summarizes the mean responses, as well as the minimum and maximum choices, for questions about tenure and legal costs, the two most frequent roadblocks found in the professional literature. Other roadblocks were determined through the qualitative interview process and were not covered on the survey.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Statements 3 and 4

Statement	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Tenure protects incompetent teachers.	1.00	5.00	3.4841
The legal costs of dismissing an incompetent teacher should be considered before any legal action is taken by an administrator.	1.00	5.00	1.1948

For statement number 3, which asks for a rating on whether or not tenure protects incompetent teachers, the minimum response was 1.00 and the maximum, 5.00. The mean for the 126 responses was 3.4841, in the *neutral to agree* range on the Likert scale. That legal costs should be considered before taking legal action against an incompetent teacher was rated with a mean score of 1.1948, with a minimum of 1.00 and a maximum of 5.00, indicating that the majority of respondents disagree that those costs should be a roadblock to dismissal of an incompetent teacher.

All interview participants agreed that tenure can be a barricade, but all then agreed it could be overcome with documentation and effort. One principal's (I-6) thought was, "There is the mistaken idea among a lot of administrators, that once a teacher gains tenure, you cannot dismiss them. That's not true. What is true is that it does become more difficult."

Other obstacles mentioned included the difficulty of dismissing a long-time faculty member who had become incompetent over time, from burnout, personal problems, or other problems. Two of the principals had to wait for support from their supervisor to begin dismissal proceedings. That support came, in both cases, only after a change in superintendents was made in the system. Time limitations/constraints of any school administrator was also considered to be a major problem. Documentation and supervision of incompetent teachers took time away from leadership and managerial needs and not only administrators were affected. Lead teachers, department heads, and colleagues also invested considerable time in an incompetent coworker. Confidentiality was mentioned regarding the inability of an administrator to explain to others the steps

being taken with an incompetent teacher, but it was considered a very necessary part of the employee/employer relationship, not an obstacle to be removed.

Tenure was mentioned in conjunction with the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program and the due process rights of teachers. A response to a question about roadblocks to dismissal was answered by I-1 in the following manner:

It's hard to get rid of a tenured teacher. It takes a lot of time and a mountain of documentation. A teacher has due process rights and any step along the way that violates can really mess up the process. With our evaluation process, they have to have been given so many chances to improve before you can even do an unsatisfactory rating. You have to keep remediating them and working with them. Some do improve to a point, but the long process usually does nothing but provide me or somebody a lot of work and the kids in that class a not-so-quality education.

Percentages of Incompetent Teachers

Survey question 10 asked for the total number of teachers on the faculty, as well as the number of teachers on the principals' faculties whom they considered to be incompetent. The answers to this question indicate that principals in the state of Georgia believe that 3.81% of teachers statewide are incompetent. One principal preferred not to answer that particular question. From 125 responses, with 6,403 teachers on staff, 244 were considered truly incompetent by their principals.

A very direct question during the interviews about numbers or percentages resulted in the perception of the participating principals that 4.5% of teachers were incompetent. One principal, I-5, replied, when asked how many incompetent teachers were on staff, "Two. Two is your answer. Two too many. I am working on that as my number-one priority. It takes a tremendous amount of time, which of course I don't have to spare." The four principals who did believe they had an incompetent teacher on staff

also added that the number should be “0.” They all declared that it was an ongoing battle that they were constantly fighting, trying to find the time and the resources to remove the incompetent teachers from their schools. As I-2 said, “whatever it takes, documentation, counseling, intensive supervision, I do it, because I have to think of the students first. They are the ultimate reason we are here.” Because the six principals interviewed were also included in the survey respondents, the percentage of 3.81 from the survey results was considered the more accurate and relevant figure. The percentage of 4.5 teachers was for the interview participants only.

Differences in the Perceptions of Principals Based on Demographic and Biographic Factors Regarding Incompetent Teachers

Using statistical data that are the result of analyses of variance, there were a total of nine significant differences between a survey statement rated with the Likert scale of 5 (*strongly agree*) and 1 (*strongly disagree*), and one of the demographic factors. The researcher uses the shortened versions (rather than the item) for each statement for ease of reading the statistical information tables, as summarized in Table 6. Additional tables summarize the results of the one-way ANOVAs and descriptives for each demographic factor; these are presented serially, along with a narrative of the data they display. The results of the ANOVA and the survey statements on the demographic factor of sex are summarized in Table 7, followed by the descriptive data for those factors in Table 8. A significant difference (at the .008 level) was found between males and females in their perceptions of the protection which tenure affords teachers. The means and standard deviations in Table 8 show that females ($M = 3.7606$) were more likely than

males ($M = 3.1273$) to view tenure as protective of teachers. However, neither sex showed a strong agreement or disagreement, as both means were between the ratings of *neutral* and *agree*.

Table 6

Abbreviated Descriptions of Likert-Scale Statements

Statements Used on Survey	Abbreviated Form
An incompetent teacher has a negative effect on student achievement in his or her class.	Student achievement
An incompetent teacher has a negative effect on his or her students' overall performance outside his or her classroom.	Students' overall performance
Tenure protects incompetent teachers	Tenure
The legal costs of dismissing an incompetent teacher should be considered before any legal action is taken by an administrator.	Legal costs
An administrator should seek the opinions of other faculty members before deciding on a teacher's competence.	Opinions of peers
An administrator should seek the opinions of students before deciding on a teacher's competence.	Opinions of students
An incompetent teacher has a negative effect on his or her colleagues.	Negative effect on peers
An incompetent teacher has a negative effect on a school's environment.	Negative effect on climate
An incompetent teacher is usually identified only by standard administrative observations.	Identified by GTEP

Table 7

Demographic Factor of Sex and Likert-Scale Statement

Abbreviated Statement	Components of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F
Student achievement	Between groups	.148	1	.148	1.202
	Within groups	15.280	124	.123	
	Total	15.429	125		
Students' overall performance	Between groups	1.256	1	1.256	1.324
	Within groups	117.602	124	.948	
	Total	118.857	125		
Tenure	Between groups	12.430	1	12.430	7.303**
	Within groups	211.039	124	1.702	
	Total	223.468	125		
Legal costs	Between groups	.312	1	.312	.217
	Within groups	178.132	124	1.437	
	Total	178.444	125		
Opinions of peers	Between groups	11.300	1	11.300	5.927*
	Within groups	236.414	124	1.907	
	Total	247.714	125		
Opinions of students	Between groups	3.622	1	3.622	2.458
	Within groups	182.735	124	1.474	
	Total	186.357	125		
Negative effect on peers	Between groups	.096	1	.096	.117
	Within groups	101.182	124	.816	
	Total	101.278	125		
Negative effect on climate	Between groups	.051	1	.051	.083
	Within groups	76.306	124	.615	
	Total	76.357	125		
Identified by GTEP	Between groups	2.688	1	2.688	2.942
	Within groups	113.280	124	.914	
	Total	115.968	125		

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 8

Descriptive Data for Demographic Factor of Sex and Likert-Scale Statements

Abbreviated Statement	Sex	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student achievement	Male	4.8182	.3892
	Female	4.8873	.3184
	Total	4.8571	.3513
Students' overall performance	Male	3.9818	.9524
	Female	4.1831	.9901
	Total	4.0952	.9751
Tenure	Male	3.1273	1.3201
	Female	3.7606	1.2924
	Total	3.4841	1.3371
Legal costs	Male	1.9455	1.2083
	Female	1.8451	1.1910
	Total	1.8889	1.1948
Opinions of peers	Male	3.0545	1.3112
	Female	2.4507	1.4322
	Total	2.7143	1.4077
Opinions of students	Male	2.4545	1.1835
	Female	2.1127	1.2369
	Total	2.2619	1.2210
Negative effect on peers	Male	4.3091	.7422
	Female	4.2535	1.0102
	Total	4.2778	.9001
Negative effect on climate	Male	4.3818	.7069
	Female	4.4225	.8394
	Total	4.4048	.7816
Identified by GTEP	Male	1.8182	.6692
	Female	2.1127	1.2820
	Total	1.9841	.9632

A significant difference (at the .016 level) was also found between males and females and their likelihood of asking for the opinions of faculty members before deciding on a teacher's competence. Males ($M = 3.054$) were more likely to seek faculty opinions than were females ($M = 2.4507$). Again, neither sex rated this statement above the neutral rating.

The demographic factor with the most significant differences was race. These differences are noted in Table 9, the results of an analysis of variance. The number of respondents for each race was: black, 27; white, 96; Hispanic, 2; and other (race not indicated), 1. Table 10 shows the means and standard deviations for the factor of race. Four significant differences (Table 9) were noted: (a) an incompetent teacher's negative effect on student achievement in his or her class (at .000 level), (b) legal costs being considered before dismissal proceedings should begin (at .031 level), (c) principals seeking opinions of faculty members before deciding on a teacher's competence (at .045 level), and (d) an incompetent teacher's negative effects on colleagues (at .008 level).

The significant difference (at .000 level) noted within race and the effect of an incompetent teacher on student achievement in his or her classroom showed a range in means to be from 5.0000 for other to 4.0000 for Hispanic, with black ($M = 4.7407$) and white ($M = 4.9062$) each falling in between. All races indicated choosing *agree* to *strongly agree* that an incompetent teacher has a negative effect on his or her students.

However, too few persons fell into the *Hispanic* and *other* categories for meaningful comparisons. The data were analyzed without those two categories and the significant differences remained.

Table 9

Demographic Factor of Race and Likert-Scale Statements

Abbreviated Statement	Components of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Student achievement	Between groups	2.087	3	.696	6.3622***
	Within groups	13.341	122	.109	
	Total	15.429	125		
Students' overall performance	Between groups	1.534	3	.511	.532
	Within groups	117.323	122	.962	
	Total	118.857	125		
Tenure	Between groups	2.960	3	.987	.546
	Within groups	220.508	122	1.807	
	Total	223.468	125		
Legal costs	Between groups	12.520	3	4.173	3.068*
	Within groups	165.925	122	1.360	
	Total	178.444	125		
Opinions of peers	Between groups	15.756	3	5.252	2.762*
	Within groups	231.958	122	1.901	
	Total	247.714	125		
Opinions of students	Between groups	7.732	3	2.577	1.760
	Within groups	178.625	122	1.464	
	Total	186.357	125		
Negative effect on peers	Between groups	9.315	3	3.105	4.119**
	Within groups	91.963	122	.754	
	Total	101.278	125		
Negative effect on climate	Between groups	2.839	3	.946	1.570
	Within groups	73.519	122	.603	
	Total	76.357	125		
Identified by GTEP	Between groups	1.047	3	.349	.370
	Within groups	114.921	122	.942	
	Total	115.968	125		

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 10

*Descriptive Data for Demographic Factor of Race
and Likert-Scale Statements*

Abbreviated Statement	Race	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student achievement	Black	4.7407	.4466
	White	4.9062	.2930
	Hispanic	4.0000	.0000
	Other	5.0000	
	Total	4.8571	.3513
Students' overall performance	Black	4.1111	1.0500
	White	4.0938	.9633
	Hispanic	3.5000	.7071
	Other	5.0000	
	Total	4.0952	.9751
Tenure	Black	3.5926	1.3939
	White	3.4271	1.3357
	Hispanic	4.5000	.7071
	Other	4.0000	
	Total	3.4841	1.3371
Legal costs	Black	2.4074	1.5753
	White	1.7188	.9916
	Hispanic	3.0000	2.8284
	Other	2.0000	
	Total	1.8889	1.1948
Opinions of peers	Black	3.3333	1.3009
	White	2.5208	1.3763
	Hispanic	3.0000	2.8284
	Other	4.0000	
	Total	2.7143	1.4077
Opinions of students	Black	2.5556	1.2506
	White	2.1458	1.6960
	Hispanic	3.0000	2.8284
	Other	4.0000	
	Total	2.2619	1.2210

Table 10 (continued)

Abbreviated Statement	Race	Mean	Standard Deviation
Negative effect on peers	Black	4.0370	.9398
	White	4.3750	.8240
	Hispanic	2.5000	2.1213
	Other	5.0000	
	Total	4.2778	.9001
Negative effect on climate	Black	4.2593	.9027
	White	4.4583	.7387
	Hispanic	3.5000	.7071
	Other	5.0000	
	Total	4.4048	.7816
Identified by GTEP	Black	2.0370	.9799
	White	1.9792	.9731
	Hispanic	2.0000	.0000
	Other	1.0000	
	Total	1.9841	.9632

That legal costs should be considered before dismissal proceedings are begun against an incompetent teacher also showed a significant difference (at .031 level) among the races. The mean of 2.4074 for blacks fell in the *disagree* to *neutral* range. Whites averaged 1.7188, falling between the *disagree* to *strongly disagree* choices. Neither race indicated that legal costs should be considered a roadblock to dismissal of incompetent teachers, even with the difference in means of black and white respondents.

The years of administrative experience showed no significant differences when related to the Likert-scale statements on the survey (see Tables 11 and 12). The longer an administrator has been involved with education, the less likely, according to the mean, he or she is to seek evaluative feedback from a faculty member about an incompetent teacher. This was the only area within this demographic factor, years in education, showing a significant difference (at .018 level). In fact, beginning with 6-10 years of total educational experience, the mean decreased with each division. There was only one respondent each for the 1-2 years and 3-5 years divisions who chose *strongly disagree* and *agree* respectively. The ANOVA results and descriptive statistics for the demographic factor, number of total years in education, can be found in Tables 13 and 14. No standard deviations were noted for the first two categories because there was only one respondent for each. As was noted earlier, the only significant difference for this demographic factor was with the statement that “an administrator should seek the opinions of other faculty members before deciding on a teacher’s competence,” as observed in Table 13.

Table 11

*Demographic Factor of Years of Administrative Experience
and Likert-Scale Statements*

Abbreviated Statement	Components of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Student achievement	Between groups	.815	5	.163	.253
	Within groups	14.614	120	.122	
	Total	15.429	125		
Students' overall performance	Between groups	4.665	5	.933	.433
	Within groups	114.192	120	.952	
	Total	118.857	125		
Tenure	Between groups	11.912	5	2.382	.248
	Within groups	211.556	120	1.763	
	Total	223.468	125		
Legal costs	Between groups	2.248	5	.450	.908
	Within groups	176.197	120	1.468	
	Total	178.444	125		
Opinions of peers	Between groups	16.616	5	3.323	.134
	Within groups	231.098	120	1.926	
	Total	247.714	125		
Opinions of students	Between groups	5.041	5	1.008	.649
	Within groups	181.316	120	1.511	
	Total	186.357	125		
Negative effect on peers	Between groups	3.480	5	.696	.514
	Within groups	97.797	120	.815	
	Total	101.278	125		
Negative effect on climate	Between groups	1.204	5	.241	.859
	Within groups	75.153	120	.626	
	Total	76.357	125		
Identified by GTEP	Between groups	7.498	5	1.500	.150
	Within groups	108.470	120	.904	
	Total	115.968	125		

Table 12

Descriptive Data for Demographic Factor, Years of Administrative Experience, and Likert-Scale Statements

Abbreviated Statement	Years of Administrative Experience	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student achievement	1-2 years	4.7857	.4258
	3-5 years	4.8000	.4104
	6-10 years	4.9189	.2767
	11-15 years	4.7500	.4423
	16-20 years	5.0000	.0000
	Over 20 years	4.9000	.3078
	Total	4.8571	.3513
Students' overall performance	1-2 years	4.0714	.7300
	3-5 years	3.9000	1.2524
	6-10 years	4.2973	.9388
	11-15 years	3.8750	1.0347
	16-20 years	3.9091	.9439
	Over 20 years	4.3000	.8013
	Total	4.0952	.9751
Tenure	1-2 years	4.1429	1.0995
	3-5 years	3.7000	1.0809
	6-10 years	3.4324	1.3026
	11-15 years	3.4167	1.3160
	16-20 years	3.4545	1.4397
	Over 20 years	3.0000	1.6543
	Total	3.4841	1.3371
Legal costs	1-2 years	2.1429	1.4064
	3-5 years	2.0000	1.1239
	6-10 years	1.8649	1.2284
	11-15 years	1.7083	1.1221
	16-20 years	2.0000	1.3416
	Over 20 years	1.8000	1.1517
	Total	1.8889	1.1948

Table 12 (continued)

Abbreviated Statement	Years of Administrative Experience	Mean	Standard Deviation
Opinions of faculty	1-2 years	3.1429	1.4601
	3-5 years	3.2000	1.3992
	6-10 years	2.8108	1.2657
	11-15 years	2.5417	1.5317
	16-20 years	2.0000	1.2649
	Over 20 years	2.3500	1.4244
	Total	2.7143	1.4077
Opinions of students	1-2 years	2.5000	1.2860
	3-5 years	2.5000	1.1471
	6-10 years	2.2973	1.2217
	11-15 years	2.2500	1.2597
	16-20 years	1.8182	1.2505
	Over 20 years	2.0500	1.2344
	Total	2.2619	1.2210
Negative effect on peers	1-2 years	3.9286	1.2067
	3-5 years	4.2500	.9105
	6-10 years	4.3243	.9734
	11-15 years	4.1667	.7614
	16-20 years	4.5455	.5222
	Over 20 years	4.4500	.8256
	Total	4.2778	.9001
Negative effect on climate	1-2 years	4.2143	.8926
	3-5 years	4.3000	.7327
	6-10 years	4.4865	.9013
	11-15 years	4.3750	.6469
	16-20 years	4.4545	.5222
	Over 20 years	4.5000	.8272
	Total	4.4048	.7816
Identified by GTEP	1-2 years	2.2143	.8926
	3-5 years	2.4000	.9403
	6-10 years	2.0270	1.2580
	11-15 years	1.7917	.5090
	16-20 years	1.7273	.4671
	Over 20 years	1.7000	.9234
	Total	1.9841	.9632

Table 13

*Demographic Factor of Years of Educational Experience
and Likert-Scale Statements*

Abbreviated Statement	Components of Variance	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean	<i>F</i>
Student achievement	Between groups	.395	5	.079	.630
	Within groups	15.034	120	.125	
	Total	15.429	125		
Students; overall performance	Between groups	9.804	5	1.961	2.158
	Within groups	109.053	120	.909	
	Total	118.857	125		
Tenure	Between groups	7.253	5	1.451	.805
	Within groups	216.216	120	1.802	
	Total	223.468	125		
Legal costs	Between groups	5.692	5	1.138	.791
	Within groups	172.752	120	1.440	
	Total	178.444	125		
Opinions of peers	Between groups	26.381	5	5.276	2.861*
	Within groups	221.334	120	1.844	
	Total	247.714	125		
Opinions of students	Between groups	13.095	5	2.619	1.814
	Within groups	173.262	120	1.444	
	Total	186.357	125		
Negative effect on peers	Between groups	8.374	5	1.675	2.163
	Within groups	92.904	120	.774	
	Total	101.278	125		
Negative effect on climate	Between groups	3.508	5	.702	1.156
	Within groups	72.849	120	.607	
	Total	76.357	125		
Identified by GTEP	Between groups	9.660	5	1.932	2.181
	Within groups	106.308	120	.886	
	Total	115.968	125		

* $p < .05$.

Table 14

Descriptive Data for Demographic Factor of Years of Educational Experience and Likert-Scale Statements

Abbreviated Statement	Years of Educational Experience	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student achievement	1-2 years	5.0000	
	3-5 years	5.0000	
	6-10 years	3.3000	.4830
	11-15 years	4.4091	.2942
	16-20 years	4.2273	.3948
	Over 20 years	4.0571	.3371
	Total	4.0952	.3513
Students' overall performance	1-2 years	4.0000	
	3-5 years	5.0000	
	6-10 years	3.3000	1.2517
	11-15 years	4.4091	.7964
	16-20 years	4.2273	.8691
	Over 20 years	4.0571	.9763
	Total	4.0952	.9751
Tenure	1-2 years	5.0000	
	3-5 years	4.0000	
	6-10 years	4.0000	1.0541
	11-15 years	3.5909	1.2212
	16-20 years	3.5455	1.1843
	Over 20 years	3.3286	1.4518
	Total	3.4841	1.3371
Legal costs	1-2 years	1.0000	
	3-5 years	2.0000	
	6-10 years	2.5000	1.6499
	11-15 years	1.9545	1.3965
	16-20 years	1.9545	.7854
	Over 20 years	1.7714	1.1693
	Total	1.8889	1.1948

Table 14 (continued)

Abbreviated Statement	Years of Educational Experience	Mean	Standard Deviation
Opinions of peers	1-2 years	1.0000	
	3-5 years	4.0000	
	6-10 years	3.6000	1.7127
	11-15 years	3.1364	1.1253
	16-20 years	3.0000	1.4142
	Over 20 years	2.3714	1.3532
	Total	2.7143	1.4077
Opinions of students	1-2 years	3.0000	
	3-5 years	4.0000	
	6-10 years	2.9000	1.2867
	11-15 years	2.1818	1.0970
	16-20 years	2.5909	1.3331
	Over 20 years	2.0571	1.1781
	Total	2.2619	1.2210
Negative effect on peers	1-2 years	4.0000	
	3-5 years	5.0000	
	6-10 years	3.5000	1.3540
	11-15 years	4.2273	1.1098
	16-20 years	4.5455	0.5096
	Over 20 years	4.3143	0.8083
	Total	4.2778	0.9001
Negative effect on climate	1-2 years	4.0000	
	3-5 years	5.0000	
	6-10 years	4.0000	0.6667
	11-15 years	4.3182	1.0414
	16-20 years	4.6364	0.4924
	Over 20 years	4.4143	0.7707
	Total	4.4048	0.7816
Identified by GTEP	1-2 years	2.0000	
	3-5 years	1.0000	
	6-10 years	2.7000	1.2517
	11-15 years	2.2727	1.2025
	16-20 years	1.8182	0.7327
	Over 20 years	1.8571	0.8561
	Total	1.9841	0.9632

Level of school also indicated elementary principals were less likely ($M = 2.3148$) than middle school principals ($M = 2.4762$) to believe it was a good idea to ask a faculty member's opinion about the competency of a colleague. The high school principal was most likely of all three ($M = 3.2353$). However, the mean scores of none of the three indicated much measure of agreement with the concept. This significant difference (at .002 level) was noted in Table 15.

The other significant difference (at .014 level) was found among the levels of school and the statement that an administrator should seek the opinions of students before deciding on a teacher's competence. The mean was much lower for elementary principals (1.9074) than the middle school (2.3810), and the high school principals' mean of 2.5882. This is no surprise because the mean rises with the age level of the students. This is also noted in Table 15. The descriptive statistics for the demographic factor of level of school are found in Table 16. Fifty-four elementary principals responded to the survey along with 21 middle school principals and 51 high school principals.

Twenty-four mostly urban school principals participated in the survey, along with 36 mostly suburban school principals and 66 mostly rural/small town school principals (see Tables 17 and 18). When statistically tested for differences among the Likert-scale statements from the survey, no significant differences were found for school setting. There was very little deviation when the principals reflected on how student achievement is affected by incompetent teachers, showing a total standard deviation of .3513. Although the remainder of the statements did show higher total standard deviations, none reported significant differences at alpha level .05 or less.

Table 15

Demographic Factor of Level of School and Likert-Scale Statements

Abbreviated Statement	Components of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Student achievement	Between groups	.003	2	.016	.012
	Within groups	15.425	123	.125	
	Total	15.429	125		
Students' overall performance	Between groups	1.226	2	0.613	.641
	Within groups	117.631	123	0.956	
	Total	118.857	125		
Tenure	Between groups	2.498	2	1.249	.695
	Within groups	220.970	123	1.797	
	Total	223.468	125		
Legal costs	Between groups	2.356	2	1.178	.823
	Within groups	176.088	123	1.432	
	Total	178.444	125		
Opinions of peers	Between groups	23.652	2	11.826	6.492**
	Within groups	224.063	123	1.822	
	Total	247.714	125		
Opinions of students	Between groups	12.515	2	6.257	4.427*
	Within groups	173.842	123	1.413	
	Total	186.357	125		
Negative effect on peers	Between groups	0.840	2	0.420	0.514
	Within groups	100.438	123	0.817	
	Total	101.278	125		
Negative effect on climate	Between groups	0.392	2	0.196	0.317
	Within groups	75.965	123	0.618	
	Total	76.357	125		
Identified by GTEP	Between groups	1.183	2	0.592	0.532
	Within groups	114.785	123	0.933	
	Total	115.968	125		

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 16

*Descriptive Data for Demographic Factor of Level of School
and Likert-Scale Statements*

Abbreviated Statement	Level of School	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student achievement	Elementary	4.8519	0.3586
	Middle	4.8571	0.3586
	High	4.8627	0.3475
	Total	4.8571	0.3513
Students' overall performance	Elementary	3.9815	0.9613
	Middle	4.1905	1.1670
	High	4.1765	0.9101
	Total	4.0952	0.9751
Tenure	Elementary	3.5926	1.2961
	Middle	3.6190	1.3956
	High	3.3137	1.3637
	Total	3.4841	1.3371
Legal costs	Elementary	1.8333	1.1117
	Middle	1.6667	1.0165
	High	2.0392	1.3411
	Total	1.8889	1.1948
Opinions of peers	Elementary	2.3148	1.3293
	Middle	2.4762	1.2091
	High	3.2353	1.4225
	Total	2.7143	1.4077
Opinions of students	Elementary	1.9074	1.1205
	Middle	2.3810	1.2032
	High	2.5882	1.2518
	Total	2.2619	1.2210
Negative effect on peers	Elementary	4.3148	0.8865
	Middle	4.0952	1.0911
	High	4.3137	0.8365
	Total	4.2778	0.9001

Table 16 (continued)

Abbreviated Statement	Level of School	Mean	Standard Deviation
Negative effect on climate	Elementary	4.3704	0.8533
	Middle	4.3333	0.9661
	High	4.4706	0.6117
	Total	4.4048	0.7816
Identified by GTEP	Elementary	1.9259	0.8655
	Middle	1.8571	0.8536
	High	2.0980	1.1001
	Total	1.9841	0.9632

Table 17

Demographic Factor of School Setting and Likert-Scale Statements

Abbreviated Statement	Components of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Student achievement	Between groups	.017	2	.008	.068
	Within groups	15.412	123	.125	
	Total	15.429	125		
Students' overall performance	Between groups	0.664	2	0.332	.345
	Within groups	118.193	123	0.961	
	Total	118.857	125		
Tenure	Between groups	5.563	2	2.781	1.570
	Within groups	217.905	123	1.772	
	Total	223.468	125		
Legal costs	Between groups	1.073	2	0.537	.372
	Within groups	177.371	123	1.442	
	Total	178.444	125		
Opinions of peers	Between groups	3.700	2	1.850	.933
	Within groups	244.014	123	1.984	
	Total	247.714	125		
Opinions of students	Between groups	0.403	2	0.201	.133
	Within groups	185.955	123	1.512	
	Total	186.357	125		
Negative effect on peers	Between groups	1.696	2	0.848	1.047
	Within groups	99.582	123	0.810	
	Total	101.278	125		
Negative effect on climate	Between groups	0.459	2	0.230	0.372
	Within groups	75.898	123	0.617	
	Total	76.357	125		
Identified by GTEP	Between groups	2.257	2	1.129	1.221
	Within groups	113.711	123	0.924	
	Total	115.968	125		

Table 18

Descriptive Data for Demographic Factor School Setting and Likert-Scale Statements

Abbreviated Statement	School Setting	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student achievement	Urban	4.8333	0.3807
	Suburban	4.8611	0.3507
	Rural	4.8636	0.3458
	Total	4.8571	0.3513
Students' overall performance	Urban	3.9583	0.9546
	Suburban	4.0833	1.0790
	Rural	4.1515	0.9322
	Total	4.0952	0.9751
Tenure	Urban	3.6250	1.4084
	Suburban	3.7500	1.1557
	Rural	3.2879	1.3897
	Total	3.4841	1.3371
Legal costs	Urban	2.0000	1.4142
	Suburban	1.7500	0.9964
	Rural	1.9242	1.2192
	Total	1.8889	1.1948
Opinions of peers	Urban	2.3750	1.4084
	Suburban	2.7222	1.4660
	Rural	2.8333	1.3765
	Total	2.7143	1.4077
Opinions of students	Urban	2.1667	1.3726
	Suburban	2.3333	1.3310
	Rural	2.2576	1.1137
	Total	2.2619	1.2210
Negative effect on peers	Urban	4.0417	1.0826
	Suburban	4.3611	0.8333
	Rural	4.3812	0.8622
	Total	4.2778	0.9001

Table 18 (continued)

Abbreviated Statement	School Setting	Mean	Standard Deviation
Negative effect on climate	Urban	4.3750	0.7697
	Suburban	4.5000	0.7746
	Rural	4.3636	0.7968
	Total	4.4048	0.7816
Identified by GTEP	Urban	1.7083	0.6903
	Suburban	2.0556	1.0940
	Rural	2.0455	0.9677
	Total	1.9841	0.9632

Leadership Strategies to Minimize the Negative Effects of Incompetent Teachers

In order to investigate research subquestion 6, *What leadership strategies do principals employ to minimize the negative effects of incompetent teachers who remain on faculties regardless of the need or effort to dismiss?*, both a quantitative and qualitative inquiry were pursued. The survey participants of the study were asked to rank the top five selections in order of effectiveness. Section 11B on the survey gave a list of management techniques that principals use when working with an incompetent teacher. Table 19 summarizes how many principals chose the techniques for the top five as well as the weighted value of each in order beginning with the greatest weighted value.

Table 19

Management Techniques Used When Working With Incompetent Teachers: Weighted Values as Ranked by 126 Respondents

Technique	Number Selecting (Percent)	Weighted Values
1. Teacher evaluation program	97 (76.9)	3.53
2. Constant supervision	101 (80.1)	3.46
3. Transfer position	115 (91.2)	3.33
4. Peer observations of incompetent teacher	80 (64.2)	3.09
5. Supportive committees	119 (94.4)	2.87
6. Schedule observations of good teachers for incompetent teacher	70 (55.5)	2.26
7. Staff development	37 (29.3)	2.03

There were seven techniques listed; however, several participating principals added strategies in the *other* category. Those included “using a mentor teacher, a peer coach,” and “career guidance and mental evaluation,” the latter listed by two respondents. Another said “to review students’ work to see where the teacher was lacking.” “Use of a personal development plan (PDP)” was also added, but was counted in with “use of GTEP or other evaluation program used in a school system.” A PDP is a required step in the GTEP for teachers who receive more than five “needs improvement” ratings or an overall “unsatisfactory” evaluation. It can be used for any teacher, but is normally considered part of the evaluation plan for a school system.

The computed weighted values ranked the techniques in an order different from the number selected. For example, “teacher evaluation program” was not selected in the top five by as many respondents (97) as “constant supervision” (101) or “transfer position” (115), but it was rated higher by those who selected it, resulting in the highest weighted value of 3.53. The management technique of “using supportive committees” was selected by most respondents, but received a weighted value of only 2.87.

The top five management techniques to use when working with incompetent teachers, as chosen and ranked in order by percentages, were “staff development,” with 94.3% of the participants choosing it; “incompetent teacher observing an effective teacher in his or her classroom,” 91.0%; “constant supervision by an administrator,” 80.4%; “supportive committee of colleagues,” 77.2%; and “peer observations by an effective teacher of the incompetent teacher,” 63.4%. One principal added a note at the bottom of the form that said, “Incompetency is very difficult to prove, whether the

administrator knows it for a fact or not. Incompetent teachers usually do something else wrong that is easier to dismiss them on.”

This research subquestion was one of the most important interview questions as it addresses the heart of the study. The research question was directly asked during the interview but some answers to this question were found in the answers of other questions because all of the areas are related. A list of 14 strategies, paraphrased below, was found during the interviews to answer the research questions (interviewee’s codes are listed parenthetically after all statements).

1. Get them out of the classroom. If not through dismissal, then transfer to another position or school. Career counseling and planning allows other options to be presented to the incompetent teacher, perhaps resulting in him or her voluntarily leaving the classroom (I-3, I-5).
2. Use very intense supervision, including frequent and lengthy observations. Follow observations with conferences concentrating on improvement strategies and discussions of what is wrong in the classroom. For concepts the teacher does not understand, model correct teaching techniques and/or discipline strategies in the teacher’s classroom. Assign an assistant principal to help with the process. Counselors, usually not trained for formal observations, can do informal visits in order to have someone in the classroom. They can offer suggestions and will be informed if problems with the students occur. Document everything (all interviewees).

3. Set up and provide release time for observations of master teachers by the incompetent teacher, both in-field and out-of-field. Other staff, such as department heads, peer teachers with strengths that complement the incompetent teacher's weaknesses, or trained mentor teachers, should be paired to work closely with that teacher (I-2, I-6).
4. Outside resources can be asked to observe the incompetent teacher and counsel with him or her. The Regional Educational Services Agency (RESA), university professors, or other experts can provide an unbiased viewpoint and invaluable help (I-2, I-3, I-4, I-5).
5. Videotape the incompetent teacher as he or she works with students in the classroom. Watch the tape with the teacher, offering suggestions for improvement. Have him or her construct another lesson, using the strategies you have offered, and videotape a second time. Compare the tapes and have the teacher point out the differences he or she notices. Conference about what worked and what did not (I-1, I-6).
6. Staff development, featuring specific strategies for the teacher's weaknesses, can be scheduled (I-1, I-2, I-3, I-6).
7. Memos can be used to redirect and advise when conferences are not feasible. They will also serve as documentation, if necessary. Memos should be used, not only for improvement purposes, but also for encouragement when at all possible (I-2).

8. Follow the evaluation instrument established for your school system. It will ensure that due process is followed. A personal development plan (PDP) is normally part of the process. This is necessary to document attempts at improvement (I-3, I-6).
9. Make the incompetent teacher part of a discussion group, established to improve and update curriculum ideas and discuss teaching strategies that work. This group may be established solely for the purpose of improving the incompetent teacher, but the members should not be aware of this. It can result in improvement school-wide as an added bonus (I-2).
10. Set and model high standards. This encourages improvement and demonstrates your expectations. This is necessary for all teachers, but especially important for an incompetent teacher (I-2, I-3, I-6).
11. Schedule observations of teachers in other schools for the incompetent teacher. Provide release time. Be sure to meet with the teacher after he or she observes to discuss the results (I-4, I-5, I-6).
12. Be fair and consistent at all times (all interviewees).
13. Be patient and offer support. Be a good, available listener. Teachers are often seen as jobs, or people in a job. Remember they are people first (I-2, I-3, I-4, I-6).
14. Encourage progress by recognizing and showing appreciation for good work, no matter how small the improvement (I-2, I-3, I-4, I-6).

The management techniques, as listed, were not offered as individual solutions to the problems of an incompetent teacher. The principals described the techniques and strategies they have tried that they believed were at least somewhat successful, not one at a time, but using many of the options concurrently. Some applied to schoolwide measures that need to be in place, such as the setting of high standards, fairness, and consistency. These items on the list are reminders for administrators to have these essential understandings in place, not only for incompetent teachers, but also for every faculty member. High standards are a prelude to a high-quality education for students.

Successful and Unsuccessful Experiences When Working With Incompetent Teachers

The qualitative research inquiry method was implemented to enhance the statistical data and to provide more in-depth meanings to any findings. During the interviews, each participant was asked to relate both a successful and an unsuccessful experience in working with an incompetent teacher. These narratives provide insight into the humanistic aspects of a principal's responsibility to his or her students. The researcher chose two success stories and two nonsuccess stories to report in the dissertation. Touching on many elements of working with an incompetent teacher, the anecdotes further indicate how situational and varied the topic is. These stories refer to characteristics of incompetent teachers and effects of incompetent teaching, roadblocks faced when attempting dismissal, and strategies that principals use when working with incompetent teachers. Like incompetent teachers, each story is unique. The researcher

reports these stories as the exact words of the interviewees, with no effort to correct for grammar or mode of expression.

The first narrative is an unsuccessful attempt at working with an incompetent teacher as related by I-4:

I've been very unsuccessful this year with one teacher. She is returning next year and I worked harder than she did to get her job done. I tried the constant observations, conferences, parent meetings, meetings with the superintendent and personnel director. We tried everything. But the documentation in the last few years was very lean on her and it seems I am going to have to accumulate more and bring in more resources. She is not teaching children what they need to know. Her manners are deplorable, her language is substandard, and the kids are afraid of her. I have been able to help some in that she does not have quite the amount of parent complaints against her, but I do not feel the teaching has really improved much. I hope to either improve that tremendously or have her resignation next year. It is very frustrating to have a teacher like that on staff, but she has had satisfactory evaluations up until I took over. The last principal did not get much support for dismissal. She [the teacher] has been here too long. I mean, because she has been here for so long, I guess it is a tradition to keep her on. But we are working on that now.

Another unsuccessful story was related by I-1:

I had a teacher on staff who was borderline incompetent. I think she could have improved if she wanted to, but she could not understand where she was deficient. She would listen in any conference I had with her, but would simply return to class and do the same things we just conferenced about. She had tenure and was a long-standing member of the community. And she was quite a nice person. Over and over again, I observed. Several years ago, we had a PDP, a professional development plan. She observed other teachers. I sent her to other schools to observe other teachers. I had other people come in and observe her and conference with her. She just smiled and nodded her head and went right on teaching the same old way.

I finally got her to resign. I had the documentation to dismiss and she knew it. She was one of those who yelled for her lawyer every five minutes, but I think she finally realized she did not have a leg to stand on. I had documentation through the roof. After she turned in her letter of resignation, the next week, believe it or not, she came back to me and asked me to fill out reference forms for her. I tried to tell her I was going to have to be very honest on those forms and she said "okay." She applied for one job where she was the only applicant and

she did not get the job. She doesn't understand yet what she was doing wrong and why she lost her job after so many years. I failed to help her improve. I feel badly for her and regret that I could not get through to her. But our kids are better off and that's what I have to remember.

Some would not consider I-1's experience as entirely unsuccessful, because the teacher was persuaded to resign.

On a more positive note, the following success story was told by I-3:

Okay, I guess there is one teacher with whom I worked with for 2 years, who taught in an area in which I was pretty ignorant. He taught what I still call "shop classes." He liked to lecture entirely too much for a class of that type and the kids came out of his classes not knowing much of what they should. I guess the teacher before him had kind of spoiled me; he was fantastic. But, I mean, the lab part of the classroom gathered dust. He was a nice guy, still is, but he could not relate to the kids. Discipline problems in shop class can result in accidents, so I guess he knew his shortcomings to some extent. He was uncomfortable with students working in groups or individual-type work. How he got into this area I will never know. I paired him with what may seem a funny combination, but it was with one of the best science teachers I have ever seen. He observed lab time and group assignments and it helped to some extent. The other teacher worked with him during I don't know how many of his own planning periods, helping him conduct labs and having students work on projects. But not enough to make him comfortable in the classroom setting he needed to be in. Like I said, I worked with him for 2 years and we got to know one another. He was not happy teaching this level of students and we were not happy with his performance.

I found him a position at a nearby technical school working with adults. I helped him get the job. I stuck my neck out because he was very knowledgeable in his area of expertise, but could not relate to teenagers. He is actually doing a good job and I get good reports on him. We see one another in the community and talk. I appreciate the changes he has made and he tells me he appreciates what I did for him. And, you know what, good shop teachers are hard to find. I've finally found a good one again. That's my success story.

Another success story, by I-5, is the final excerpt the researcher will share from the six interviews she conducted:

Well, I guess, if you part on good terms that is considered a success. It is important to part with an incompetent teacher, and I usually do in the end. But if you can do it without hard feelings, that is much better. I had one teacher that

was just terrible. I only can blame myself because I am the one that hired her. She rarely sent discipline problems to the office because she handled them herself, but the kids were afraid of her. I found out why in a string of parent conferences, not through observations. Also, her neighboring teachers shared some interesting information with me. She yelled at the kids and belittled them. She made fun of their weaknesses and constantly reminded the students about them. I tried to support her during parent conferences and bring out the reasons she was led to these actions and she appreciated my efforts once she saw where I was coming from. We worked on her problem together and I think she understood what I was trying to get her to do, but then her discipline went to pieces. She did not have a clue how to mete out fair, consistent discipline in a caring manner. She understood her weakness, just didn't know what to do about it. She left of her own accord, on good terms. She thanked me then and later on. She is working with her husband in his insurance office now and is doing well. She is working on her real estate license and will end up making three times the money she could make in teaching. I'm happy for her and for me. It turned out well for both of us.

Summary

The researcher has taken a voluminous amount of material and reduced it categorically to answer the research questions proposed. The interpretative biases and personal values of the researcher have influenced what data was chosen to be presented to some extent, a characteristic of qualitative research. The participants' perspectives and meanings have been translated through a process of categorizing and pattern seeking.

It is hoped that, when combined with the quantitative data amassed through the implementation of the survey, a more humanistic outcome to the research will have been achieved, as solutions cannot be reduced to numbers in this case. The data received through the survey process was used as background for the interviews. It provided input from a broader spectrum. The overarching research question asks how principals manage incompetent teachers who remain in their classrooms. Like the definition of an incompetent teacher, the answer is situational and conditional. The two research

approaches, qualitative and quantitative, were used to complement each other and to provide overlapping, yet different, facets of the research results.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through personal frustration with an incompetent teacher, the researcher designed this study to search for ways to minimize the negative effects of the incompetent teachers who remain on faculties, regardless of the attempts to dismiss. A review of the related literature revealed a gap in research. While related topics such as dismissal proceedings and due process rights are included in the literature, managing and minimizing the negativity of the incompetent teacher in the classroom setting was not found.

The study was intended to answer the major question: *How do principals manage incompetent teachers who have evaded dismissal and are remaining in classrooms under their supervision?* In order to address this issue, the following areas of teacher incompetency, as perceived by Georgia principals, have been investigated:

1. What characteristics of teachers do principals perceive as indicative of incompetency?
2. What do principals perceive as the negative effects of incompetent teachers?
3. What roadblocks to dismissal of incompetent teachers do principals most frequently encounter?
4. What percentage of teachers under their supervision do principals believe are truly incompetent?

5. Are there differences in the perceptions of principals based on demographic and biographic factors regarding incompetent teachers?
6. What leadership strategies do principals employ to minimize the negative effects of incompetent teachers who remain on faculties regardless of the need or effort to dismiss?

Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were chosen because the topic of the incompetent teacher proved to be situational and difficult to measure. Even attempts at finding a definitive meaning for the term, *incompetent teacher*, were hard to come by; the researcher encountered vagueness and a broad range of ideas that were expressed in literature and through the court cases that addressed the topic.

Quantitative data were gathered by use of a survey, designed by the researcher, which was distributed to a sample of the population of Georgia school principals. Some perceptions of the incompetent teacher, discovered in the literature, were explored through statements measured by a Likert scale, through lists of characteristics and strategies for rating purposes, and with a demographic section for comparison purposes.

Qualitative data were amassed through personal interviews of six Georgia principals. This technique was chosen to include the humanistic aspect of the topic and to extend the meaning of the data received through the survey. It proved to be a very enlightening process.

Analysis of the Research Findings

An analysis of the data received through the research is organized, as was the reporting of data, by the research questions that prompted and guided the study as it

progressed. Because much of the data is applicable to more than one research question, the questions are not used as subheadings.

The survey administered to principals contributed information about their perceptions regarding incompetent teachers. The list of characteristics included in the survey was rated by the participants and a clearer view of the identification of the incompetent teacher was provided by the principals, trained and experienced personnel who must cope with these teachers. The interviews added insight into the relationships of these characteristics. The top five characteristics by weighted values were, rated in order of the importance attributed to them by survey respondents: poor quality of instruction, lack of content knowledge, failure to control students, lack of caring for students, and poorly organized lesson plans and records. The interviews provided the additional perception that these characteristics are interrelated and one may be the cause of another. It also became clear that the presence of any or all of these characteristics does not mean that a teacher is totally incompetent, as there are degrees and areas of incompetency. The researcher was unable to uncover a definitive meaning, only a general idea of the *incompetent teacher*. It seems the incompetent teacher defines the characteristics, rather than the characteristics defining the incompetent teacher.

Statements on the survey, which were related to the negative effects of an incompetent teacher, were analyzed by the mean responses using a Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). The strongest agreement, showing a mean of 4.8571, indicated that the respondents believed incompetent teachers had the greatest negative effect on student achievement within their own classrooms. The perception of the effect on school environment, on colleagues, and overall school

performance of students was found to be from *agree* (4) to *strongly disagree* (1), with means ranging from 4.4048 to 4.0952. The interviews again provided additional perceptions of what those effects are. For students, the effect can be “lowering self-esteem” and “quality of education,” as well as “leave open the opportunity for accidents in classrooms.” Incompetent teachers cause the workload of their colleagues to increase, whether the result of overcoming the inadequacies and gaps in the educational process, or by assignment to work with the incompetent teacher in his or her area(s) of deficiency. Teacher incompetency also lowers morale and standards for a school. Whereas the survey data indicated that principals agree the negative effects occur, the interview process was helpful in clarifying the effects.

Statements regarding tenure and legal costs as potential roadblocks to dismissal of an incompetent teacher were included in the survey. The mean, 3.4841, for the degree of agreement indicated that tenure is not clearly thought of as a roadblock. There was a slight difference noted in the means of male (3.1273) and female (3.7606) participants in response to this statement. Interviewed participants regarded tenure as an obstacle, but it was considered to be a weak defense to not dismissing a teacher if necessary. They stated that it could be overcome, but only by following procedures and compiling documentation and by devoting a tremendous amount of time and dedication to the task. It seemed to the researcher, who conducted the interviews that the women questioned have a different attitude from their male counterparts on the problems posed by tenure. The three females interviewed appeared to approach tenure as a barrier to be hurdled, but only after the proper steps are taken. The three males seemed to perceive tenure as less threatening, or less likely to make a difference in the outcome of a dismissal procedure.

Legal costs were not believed to be a roadblock. Even though this study's statistics indicated that blacks may be more inclined to consider legal costs before beginning dismissal proceedings, the total mean of 1.89, implied that very few administrators perceived legal costs to be a serious concern.

The interview process revealed several other perceptions of what can stand in the way of dismissing an incompetent teacher. When a teacher is a long-time faculty member and has been an effective teacher, but, because of burnout or personal problems, becomes ineffective or incompetent, it is difficult to dismiss that teacher. Such a teacher becomes more of a personality and less of a position, making it difficult to justify dismissal, even though the teacher may be doing considerable harm. A positive history with a teacher is difficult to overcome when it becomes necessary. Some of the management techniques discussed further in the analysis, however, can be helpful in overcoming this problem.

Another barrier is the lack of time in an administrator's day. This has to be overcome with organization and setting priorities, but even then important responsibilities may be ignored and unfulfilled. Confidentiality was mentioned in one interview, not so much as a problem, but as a tool that can be used by an incompetent teacher to create dissension, but cannot and should not be breached by an administrator in order to resolve the problem. It was viewed more as a road sign than a roadblock, cautioning administrators to prepare for the possibility.

The percentage of teachers considered to be incompetent by the survey respondents was 3.81. This is lower than some estimates in the literature, indicating a range of 5% to 15% (Bridges, 1990; Ellis, 1994; Fuhr, 1993; Johnson, 1991). The 3.81%

was a perception of the principals of 6,403 teachers, who believed there to be a total of 244 incompetent teachers under their supervision. Four of the six interview participants indicated they had incompetent teachers on staff, but it was not an acceptable position to them. They were very adamant that any incompetent teacher was too many. They agreed that, although some dismissals may take more time and more work, they will end in dismissal if retirement or resignation is not forthcoming.

The differences found when comparing demographic information with the survey responses that have not been previously discussed were found in the responses to statements that faculty or student input should be considered before deciding on a teacher's competence. Only one demographic, level of school, showed a significant difference regarding student input. This was probably because of the age levels of students within a school, as the high school principal was more likely, with a mean of 2.5882, to seek student input than was an elementary principal, whose mean was 1.9074. The middle school principal, was found to be, appropriately, in the middle, with a mean of 2.3810. None of the three indicated a very strong likelihood that they would seek student input, as all three means were on the *disagree* part of the scale.

The idea of seeking faculty input was the source of other differences found among four demographics factors for which data were collected. Males responded as more likely than females to seek faculty input, but neither mean was found outside the *disagree* range. Blacks were more likely than whites, but the presence of one response to *other* in the race choice, who responded with a 4.00 (agree) on the Likert scale, may have skewed the value of significant difference. Again, only one of the means was above the *disagree* or *neutral* level.

Within the years of administrative experience, disregarding the input of “1-2” and “3-5 years,” for which there was only one response each, the means ranged from 2.8108 for “6-10 years,” to 2.3500 for “over 20 years.” In other words, the more experience principals had in an administrative position, not surprisingly, the less likely he or she was to seek faculty input about teacher competency.

The means of principals’ perceptions differed by the level of school: elementary, 2.3148; middle, 2.4762; and high, 3.2353. The nature of the school may have caused these differences. Elementary teachers are often in self-contained classrooms, middle schools find teachers working in teams, and in high schools, teachers share students with several other teachers. Based on the researcher’s experience, the professional interaction among teachers, if this observation is correct, declines with the level of the school in most cases; this may be the reason for the different perceptions found.

At the core of the research, management techniques and strategies that have been found to be successful with incompetent teachers, can be invaluable information to administrators. A list of management techniques was provided on the survey for principals to rate in order of their perceived effectiveness. The top five selections, by weighted values were: teacher evaluation programs, constant supervision, transfer position, peer observations of incompetent teacher, and supportive committees. Surprisingly, from the survey results, the interview participants did not put much faith in staff development, even though they considered it useful for documentation purposes. The qualitative data expanded and enlightened the choices of techniques and strategies. During the interview, the participants were not asked to rate the effectiveness of their techniques in order to elicit as many responses as possible. A frustrated administrator

needs all the ideas and suggestions he or she can find when coping with an incompetent teacher on any level. The list found in Chapter 4 is a much more useful tool than the list offered on the survey, not only because it offers explanations, but because it is a result of experienced use of these techniques. It suggests many more effective strategies, ideas which cannot only help manage an incompetent teacher, but may provide proactive ideas to avoid the problem altogether and improve one's total educational environment.

Discussion of Research Findings

During a review of the related literature, the researcher found much information about dismissing an incompetent teacher, the pitfalls and problems, and the processes to follow in order to accomplish the dismissal. There was agreement that incompetent teachers remain on faculties, but there was a gap in the information about how to manage these teachers while they remain on faculties. Incompetent teachers can have a very negative effect on the educational process, and there are many administrators who can benefit from new ideas and from this research.

The definition of an incompetent teacher found in the literature remains vague and subjective, even after this study. There are varying degrees and areas of incompetency, which mean one thing for one teacher, but may have an entirely different meaning for another teacher. This study did not result in a definitive meaning for the term *incompetent teacher*, but it helped the researcher more fully understand the concept and the idea that the incompetent teacher defines his or her own characteristics. A list of characteristics, compiled from the research, is only a database of information. This list is not and cannot be a definition, because each incompetent teacher is an entity within

himself or herself, causing myriad, yet different, problems, and having myriad, yet different, characteristics from the next incompetent teacher.

Impediments to dismissal were summarized in the literature and no new ideas really came from this study. A realistic view about how to overcome tenure, legal costs, and other difficulties, is part of the qualitative data gathered during this study. The literature presented more statistical data about the current status of roadblocks and the incompetent teacher, but did not offer much in the way of solutions.

The pervasiveness of teacher incompetency was much discussed in the literature. There were many figures and estimates presented, and this study is offered as an update for the percentage of teacher incompetency in the state of Georgia. Most estimates in the literature ranged from 5% to 15%, and this study resulted in 3.81%. This could indicate that incompetency is being managed more effectively, that the state of Georgia has a lower percentage of incompetent teachers than the rest of the country, or that this sample studied did not present a true picture. It is, nonetheless, additional research that contributes to the professional literature.

The literature was used to help form the list of management techniques that was presented on the survey. It was the result of techniques mainly used for attempting dismissal, as this was the focus of the literature. The difference between the list on the survey and the list compiled from the interviews seems vast to the researcher. The ideas shared by the present study's participants seem much more humanistic in nature and more imaginative in scope. As an assistant principal, the researcher does not have the power of dismissal and looks more toward improving a teacher's performance. The ideas from the interviews are not found together in the literature. Different articles or research

projects may study one or more techniques, but these strategies are not collectively discussed. The literature is lacking in this area.

Conclusions

This study was an effort to find techniques and strategies that administrators have successfully used when working with an incompetent teacher. While searching for this information, much more information was gathered about incompetent teachers.

Characteristics, effects, and percentages of incompetent teachers have been researched and strengthen the information found in previous research. This study helps in the identification of the teachers, of the effects they have on personnel and the school environment, how to recognize them and an idea of how many teachers need to be worked with more closely. Recognizing the roadblocks to dismissal is helpful in avoiding the problems they may cause.

The overarching question of how principals manage incompetent teachers who have evaded dismissal and remain in classrooms under their supervision is the focus of the research that resulted in a list of ideas that can be used to improve the educational focus of a teacher. The principals who provided these items are experienced, trained instructional leaders and personnel managers who, unfortunately, have many other responsibilities not related to instruction and personnel. Because education is principally “a people business,” there are no standard operating procedures. Of course, there are guidelines to be followed, but they do not meet the needs of every situation. The suggestions made for working with incompetent teachers are not the ultimate answer. A very comprehensive list has been generated that will help with a broad spectrum of

problems and should also be consulted in order to prevent problems from occurring. Skills in relating to people and to identifying problems are still required.

Implications

The inquiry that resulted in this study is the direct result of the researcher's frustration with problems related to an incompetent teacher. The majority of personnel who are assigned to work with an incompetent teacher do not have the power to dismiss, and even those who do have this power must follow a process that can be very time consuming and ultimately unsuccessful. Improving a teacher's performance, or at least minimizing the negative effects of an incompetent teacher, may be the only options for a given time period.

Newly appointed administrators, administrators-in-training, and even administrators who have been in their current positions for some time, can benefit from the experience of others, whether it is a positive or negative experience. As a newly appointed assistant principal, the researcher was given the responsibility of working with an incompetent teacher and striving to help her improve her performance. Improvement was not forthcoming. Following the steps outlined by the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP), the researcher soon became very frustrated with the amount of paperwork and the lack of suggestions the system provided. The training for using this evaluation program appeared stilted and seemed to encourage stereotyping of teachers. It indicated that all teachers respond the same way when certain techniques are used. The literature indicates that incompetence is very difficult to prove and that teachers often do

not get dismissed for that reason. This study was a search for alternatives to going straight to dismissal proceedings, which is not feasible.

This study has concluded with a presentation of much information about incompetent teachers, but the researcher believes the comprehensive list of management techniques that was developed to be the most valuable outcome. This list not only provides help when working with problem teachers already identified, it may help in actually preventing problems. When a school sets and adheres to high standards, it attracts high-quality teachers who strive to maintain those standards. This can result in a school free of incompetent teachers, and one with a positive learning environment. Many of the options on the list should be used in everyday practice when working with faculty members--for example, encouraging progress by recognizing and showing appreciation for good work, no matter how small the improvement. Such an approach is effective with good teachers as well as incompetent teachers. This compilation of ideas should be valuable to anyone in the field of education.

Dissemination

The researcher believes the information gathered in this study will be valuable in the field of education. The use of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques was important to the study and could be used to advantage with other topics. The experience, benefits, or problems of using dual techniques is an area open to investigation. The purpose of the research strategy in this study may be of interest to other investigators and can be summarized for a journal article about the subject.

Quantitative and qualitative research techniques each have benefits and drawbacks, but it can certainly be advantageous to use a combination of both research approaches.

The last research subquestion, *What leadership strategies do principals employ to minimize the negative effects of incompetent teachers who remain on faculties regardless of the need or effort to dismiss?*, resulted in the compilation of a list of techniques and strategies that can stand alone as valuable research. A description of the interview process used, combined with a short background of the study, and published with the list of strategies would be an important step in disseminating some of the results of this study for use by administrators who are working with incompetent teachers or searching for ideas with which to improve their faculties' performance.

Recommendations

Further research is indicated, as this study has resulted in a list that the researcher has compiled, but not experimented with. All the information amassed in the study gives a clearer picture of an incompetent teacher, but it must be remembered that a model for the definition of incompetent teacher does not exist; each teacher is unique. Use of the techniques found in the results of the study will, it is hoped, lead to positive changes in individual teachers as well as entire faculties. A study of the effect of any given technique can stimulate further inquiry and may help in clarifying how effective the technique may be.

Another area of needed research is the topic of the weak or otherwise incompetent administrator. Some schools have been allowed to become less than desirable places to send one's children for a high-quality education, with dissatisfied teachers and students.

Which techniques from the list in this study are being used by the administrator and which are not? Does it make a difference and if so, how? The principal is, ideally, the school's instructional leader. What are the characteristics of a good instructional leader? Are the characteristics as individualized and as difficult to define as those determining the meaning of the term *incompetent teacher*?

Closing Statement

The researcher had much help in investigating this topic, and the results are based on the experience and willingness of many busy principals who volunteered their time and knowledge. The results will not answer all questions about incompetent teachers, but it is hoped that this study will be used to improve the educational experience for one's students. Ideally, the 126 principals who did choose to participate in either phase of the research will accept any improvements resulting from this study as their reward.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Question

Interview Questions

1. What is your opinion of the survey? Did it capture the essence of the incompetent teacher?
2. What issues, if any, do you think were not addressed in the survey?
3. What do you consider to be the major characteristics of an incompetent teacher?
4. What are some strategies you use to minimize the negative effects of incompetent teachers?
5. Under your supervision, do you find many teachers in your school are incompetent? Either a percentage or a number will be fine.
6. Do you distinguish between a marginal teacher and an incompetent teacher, and, if so, how?
7. What ideas do you have about professional development and support for incompetent teachers? What has worked for you and what has not?
8. Research indicates incompetent teachers have a negative effect on a school's environment. What steps have you actually taken to minimize these effects?
9. How have you attempted to overcome roadblocks, for example, tenure or nonsupport from a supervisor, to dismissing a teacher? What are those roadblocks and have you been successful? What strategies have you tried?
10. Please relate one of your success stories when working with an incompetent teacher.
11. Please relate one of your unsuccessful attempts at working with an incompetent teacher.

Appendix B: Cover Letter and Survey

Georgia S. Collins
102 N. Clark Street
Claxton, GA 30417

Dear Colleague:

I am a high school assistant principal and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University, conducting an educational research project under the direction of Dr. Harbison Pool. The purpose of this study is to determine what methods principals use to minimize the negative effects of incompetent teachers in Georgia classrooms. Incompetency in the teaching profession is a problem all administrators face at some time in their careers and it is essential to the education of our students to learn all that we can in order to promote success in our profession.

I have enclosed a short survey in order to collect data about your perceptions of incompetent teachers and what you might do in order to help those teachers. The information will be treated confidentially and the data will be utilized so that no individual respondents will be identified. The surveys are coded in order to know who has responded and to choose interview participants from those principals who desire to continue in the study. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and to return it in the envelope provided. If you desire a copy of the results, there is a section on the survey for you to request a copy.

Interviews will be employed to gather more in-depth information regarding principal's perceptions about incompetent teachers. Each interview will be recorded and a transcription will be provided for your approval. Complete confidentiality will be maintained and all records will be destroyed at the completion of this project. Your participation will enhance any statistical findings from the survey process and will be greatly appreciated.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. You may reach me during the day at Claxton High School, 912-739-3993, or evenings at 912-739-3510. Any questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-5465.

I thank you in advance for your support and assistance. The results of the study should provide very valuable information about incompetent teachers and how principals can cope with them. It is an area of great concern.

Sincerely,

Georgia S. Collins

Principals' Perceptions of Incompetent Teachers

The purpose of this survey is to assess administrative perceptions regarding the problems caused by an incompetent teacher and his or her effect on a school's students, faculty, and environment. Your responses will be kept **completely confidential**. Your honesty and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Please circle the response that best describes your level of agreement for each of the following statements:

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Unsure/Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|-------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | An incompetent teacher has a negative effect on student achievement in his or her class. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. | An incompetent teacher has a negative effect on his or her students' overall performance outside his or her classroom. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. | Tenure protects incompetent teachers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. | The legal costs of dismissing an incompetent teacher should be considered before any legal action is taken by an administrator. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. | An administrator should seek the opinions of other faculty members before deciding on a teacher's competence. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. | An administrator should seek the opinions of students before deciding on a teacher's incompetence. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. | An incompetent teacher has a negative effect on his or her colleagues. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. | An incompetent teacher has a negative effect on a school's environment. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. | An incompetent teacher is usually identified only by standard administrative observations. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. | Please answer in numerical form. | | | | | |
| | Total number of teachers on your faculty | _____ | | | | |
| | Number of teachers on your faculty
whom you consider to be incompetent | _____ | | | | |

Please continue on page 2

11. Your responses to the following questions are very important. Your comments are appreciated and will be kept confidential. Your name is not required on any part of this survey.

A. Please rank the **top five** characteristics indicating incompetency from the following list, in order of importance, beginning with the most important to you:

1. Failure to control students
2. Unprofessional appearance of classroom
3. Excessive absences
4. Lack of caring for students
5. Poorly organized lesson plans and records
6. Unfair evaluation of student work
7. Poor quality of instruction
8. Lack of knowledge of learning styles
9. Lack of content knowledge
10. Poor attitude
11. Lack of knowledge of growth and development of students/youth
12. Other _____

1st _____ **2nd** _____ **3rd** _____ **4th** _____ **5th** _____

B. Please rank the **top five** management techniques you would use when working with an incompetent teacher, beginning with the most effective technique:

1. Constant supervision by an administrator
2. Peer observations by effective teacher of incompetent teacher
3. Incompetent teacher observes effective teacher in classroom
4. Transfer to a different position and/or grade level
5. Staff development
6. Supportive committee of colleagues (e.g., central office personnel, RESA consultants, administrators from other school, peer teachers) to work with incompetent teacher
7. Use of GTEP or other school district teacher evaluation system
8. Other _____

1st _____ **2nd** _____ **3rd** _____ **4th** _____ **5th** _____

12. Please share any further comments, suggestions, or questions. They will be appreciated.

Please continue on page 3

Please check the appropriate response to the following questions about yourself:

Sex: Male ___ Female ___

Race: Black ___ White ___ Hispanic ___ Other _____

Years of administrative experience: 1-2 ___ 3-5 ___ 6-10 ___ 11-15 ___

16-20 ___ over 20 ___

Years in education: 1-2 ___ 3-5 ___ 6-10 ___ 11-15 ___ 16-20 ___ over 20 ___

Level of school: Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___

School setting: Mostly Urban ___ Mostly Suburban ___ Mostly Rural/Small
Town ___

Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up interview?

Yes ___ No ___

Would you be interested in receiving a copy of the results of this survey?

Yes ___ No ___

Thank you for your help and concern.

Please continue on page 3

Appendix C: IRB Approval Form

Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-681-5465

Fax: 912-681-0719


OvrSight@gasou.edu

P.O. Box 8005

Statesboro, GA 30460-8005

To: Georgia S. Collins
Leadership, Technology and Human Development

Cc: Dr. Bud Pool, Faculty Advisor
Leadership, Technology and Human Development

From: Mr. Neil Garretson, Coordinator 
Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: July 17, 2001

Subject: Status of Conditional IRB Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee has received your revised and/or additional application materials for the approved research titled, "What Principals Do to Minimize the Negative Effects of Incompetent Teachers." You have satisfactorily met the conditions of your Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, as detailed in the July 13, 2001 approval letter.

Please remember that this approval is in effect for one year (7/13/01 – 7/13/02) and if at the end of that time there have been no substantive changes to the approved methodology, you may request a one year extension of the approval period.

Good luck with your research efforts, and if you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the status of your approval, please do not hesitate to contact me.