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Factors affecting student retention at one independent school in the southwest

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FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT RETENTION

AT ONE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL IN THE SOUTHWEST

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Dan R. Ahlstrom

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Diana B. Hiatt-Michael, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife Shannon and my children,

Alexander, Emma, William, and Thomas. Thank you for your love patience and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

the time to give their heartfelt insight and comments regarding retention. Your

contribution will provide educators with more insight into student retention at

independent schools.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife Shannon and my four children Alex, Emma,

William, and Thomas. Your endurance, love, and patience during this long journey has

been nothing short of astonishing. To everyone who supported me while I took this

journey, my heartfelt gratitude.

VITA

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods case study determined the factors and examined the issues associated with student retention at a faith-based independent day school in southwestern United States of America. The data included online surveys, personal interviews, collection of archival information, and the researcher's extensive field notes. Surveys (530) were distributed to the board of trustees, administration, faculty, parents, and other stakeholders. Current parents responded to the survey at 71.5%, faculty responded at 47.8%, and board members responded, at 27%. Therefore, parents comprised the largest percentage of respondents by constituency to the survey. To gather more in-depth perceptions, 21 personal interviewees were purposely identified to equally represent the school's 5 groups of stakeholders. These semi-structured long interviews were conducted by the researcher and a trained assistant. The researchers' extensive notes across the year, and archival data portraying the school since its inception secured significant information to support valid results.

The first research question focused on factors stakeholders perceived were important to retention. Based upon the results of this study, a model noting the 5 factors that affect retention at faith-based independent schools was developed. These 5 factors were identified: positive relationships, affordability, clear communication, action plan for retention, and living the school mission. Positive relationships among the stakeholders were an overarching theme. The mission of the school—the focus on a balance of high quality general studies, faith-based curriculum, values and culture—was an essential factor in student retention Stakeholders perceived a need for better marketing and recruiting throughout fifth grade. Stakeholders were also concerned about affordability

and perceive a need for financial aid as an issue in retention. The school administration needs focus on improving positive communication.

The second research question asked stakeholders to list perceived issues that relate to retention. Based on the results of this study the predominant issues are: relationship building by administration, fine tuning communication from administration to the school community, finding the right balance between faith based and academic curriculum, exclusivity versus inclusivity of non-Jewish students, tuition support, recruiting throughout the grade levels, and improving the school's marketing strategy.

Chapter 1: Problem and Purpose

Introduction

The recession has affected school budgets across the nation. With state government decreasing its investment in public education and the rising popularity of private, independent, charter, homeschooling, and other alternative education models, parents have more opportunities than ever before to choose the schools their children will attend (Bushaw & Lopez, 2012; Hollenbeck, 2008; Pegeas, 2006; Resnick, 2006). Additionally, the recent Supreme Court ruling, *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn* (2011) has given parents the power to divert tax money in the form of a credit to the school of their choice giving parents more control in choosing and subsidizing schools for their children. With the ability of parents to control how their tax dollars are spent for education, recruiting and retaining students has become a significant issue for all schools (ISM, 2010a; Raymond, 2007; Sykes, 1996).

Until recently, school choice was primarily limited to religiously affiliated or private schools. However, school choice has now expanded considerably (Beal & Noel, 1979; Chen, 2010; Walters & McCay, 2005). One of these choices is independent schools. Independent schools are autonomous in governance and finance, and administrators of these schools are free to define their own mission and establish their own expectations for teacher credentials and student performance (Florida Council of Independent Schools, 2011). These schools are nonprofit organizations that rely on tuition for a majority of their funding.

With an increasing number of families choosing schools for their children and limited financial resources for many parents, independent school administrators have

historically focused on recruiting new students in order to meet adequate enrollment requirements (Beal & Noel, 1979; Bean, 1980; Walters & McCay, 2005). However, considering the finite number of families who can afford an independent school education and the wider range of school choices for prospective parents, a recruitment focused strategy is no longer sufficient. Independent schools have an average enrollment of 486 students and an average attrition rate of 10.51%, according to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS, n.d.). With the total enrollment for National Association of Independent Schools at 587,027 and an average tuition of $14,000, independent schools stand to lose $680,400 in tuition annually due to attrition (NAIS, 2012). Thus, improving student retention is an important factor in maintaining enrollment and stabilizing private school budgets. The issue of student retention affects independent schools across the country. If schools do not attend to these issues, they will not survive.

Problem Statement

Enrollment is declining at King David School (KDS), a small pluralistic Kindergarten through eighth grade urban, and faith-based independent day school in the southwest. This school strives for academic excellence through an interdisciplinary, integrated general studies and Judaic program with an emphasis on Jewish values. Enrollment at its peak was over two hundred students and now has declined to 156 students; however, the reasons for this decline are currently unknown. The board of directors is taking on the responsibility to preserve the school as it currently stands but is not sure what it should do to change the trend in attrition. As the social science journalist in a popular book entitled *The Tipping Point*, author Malcolm Gladwell points out, "The key to getting people to change their behavior sometimes lies with the smallest details"

(Gladwell, 2002, p. 29). The board of directors, school administrators, and other stakeholders are aware of the importance of retaining students. When a successful student who has been a part of a school community for many years (such as kindergarten through fifth grade) chooses to leave, the event can be too traumatic for faculty, the remainder of the class, and the school community. Teachers and staff often take the departure personally and want to know why the student left and examine what small details could have been done differently so that other students and families do not leave.

The board of trustees is also concerned. With decreasing enrollment, the school has not been able to give annual pay increases or contribute to teacher retirement as in past years, and the board of directors is concerned that good teachers will leave. Declining enrollment also affects the staff's, parents,' and students' current image of KDS as a school that provides an excellent educational environment that everyone wants to be a part of. In a nearby town, a similar school changed its mission in an attempt to boost enrollment and changed its status as an independent day school to a public charter school this decision was not supported by the community and ultimately the school did not survive. The KDS board of directors is concerned that KDS will suffer the same fate if they make changes that the community does not support but at the same time feels something must be done to reverse the recent decline in enrollment. Declining enrollment also affects the educational environment. With less students and tuition revenue, the board of directors is concerned that the school will not be able to continue to pay for curricular programs like physical education, art, class trips, or other non-core activities.

Previous research (Beal & Noel, 1979; Bean, 1980) has focused on retention as it relates to dropout, low graduation rates, and student attrition (Rootman, 1972; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975; Walters & McCay, 2005), in public high school and community colleges. Little research has been done on factors associated with retention in independent schools (Gallanter, 1994; Pegeas, 2006; Raymond, 2007; Sykes, 1996).

As student retention becomes more of a priority, independent schools are increasingly engaged in encouraging consistent student enrollment. Administrators and board members of independent schools who are able to maintain steady enrollment are more likely to create a school environment that is secure in its budgets and curriculum (Sykes, 1996). Likewise, when students remain enrolled, the structural stability of the school is likely to improve (Schein, 2006). Since student tuition accounts for 65% to 80% of independent school revenue, retention stabilizes the budget from a financial perspective (The Lab School, 2012). Students who remain enrolled continue to pay tuition. When enrollment is steady, school budgets remain consistent and school administrators can make long term goals based on steady enrollment. These goals can lead to an increase in faculty and course offerings, technology, student counseling, or any other school offerings that would make the KDS a more desirable school for its constituents.

Board members, administrators, and other stakeholders need to know what factors influence retention and to what degree these factors influence a student or family's decision to remain at any independent school. Thus, with new admissions no longer adequate to maintain a consistent enrollment, retention of students in independent schools is of paramount importance for fiscal sustainability while meeting the expectations of

clients served: students and their parents. Few independent schools have examined their

retention policies (Sykes, 1996). At present KDS has not formally analyzed the factors

associated with parents' decisions regarding their children's enrollment and reenrollment,

nor has this school examined the relationship between parents' rationale for enrolling and

reenrolling and recruitment and retention policies and practices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to (a) examine the

circumstances and factors associated with changes in student enrollment at KDS (b)

analyze the steps taken by the board of directors, administration, and other stakeholders

to revitalize this school with the intent to increase enrollment and reduce attrition. This

study raised research questions and gathered details through an analysis of archival

documents, a pilot group, school records, interviews with parents, and with other

stakeholders to examine why parents select and maintain their children's enrollment in

one independent school in Arizona. This study identified factors and themes that

emerged and analyzed how they change as students' transition from elementary to middle

school. The researcher also investigated how these factors and themes are reflected in the

school's retention policies and practices for elementary and middle school students in

order to increase the ability of the school faculty and administrators to better meet

parents' needs and expectations.

Research Questions

Based upon the literature review, the following research questions apply:

1. What is stakeholders' understanding of the student retention and recruitment at an

   independent faith-based day school?

2. What actions are stakeholders aware of that have been taken to improve student retention and recruitment at an independent faith-based day school?

3. What policy changes do stakeholders believe would make a positive impact on student retention and recruitment at an independent faith-based day school?

4. What level of importance do stakeholders place on various factors that affect student retention and recruitment policies?

Theoretical Model

An in-depth survey of the literature revealed no model connecting components that might lead to student retention and recruitment. However, this review of literature did indicate that certain factors may be connected to student retention and recruitment. Therefore, the researcher proposes the following model as a way to categorize components that may or may not be related to student retention and recruitment at an independent school.

School Choice, Recruitment, Affordability	Curricular Offerings
Student Retention	
School Mission, Leadership, Faculty	Parent & Student Satisfaction, School Culture
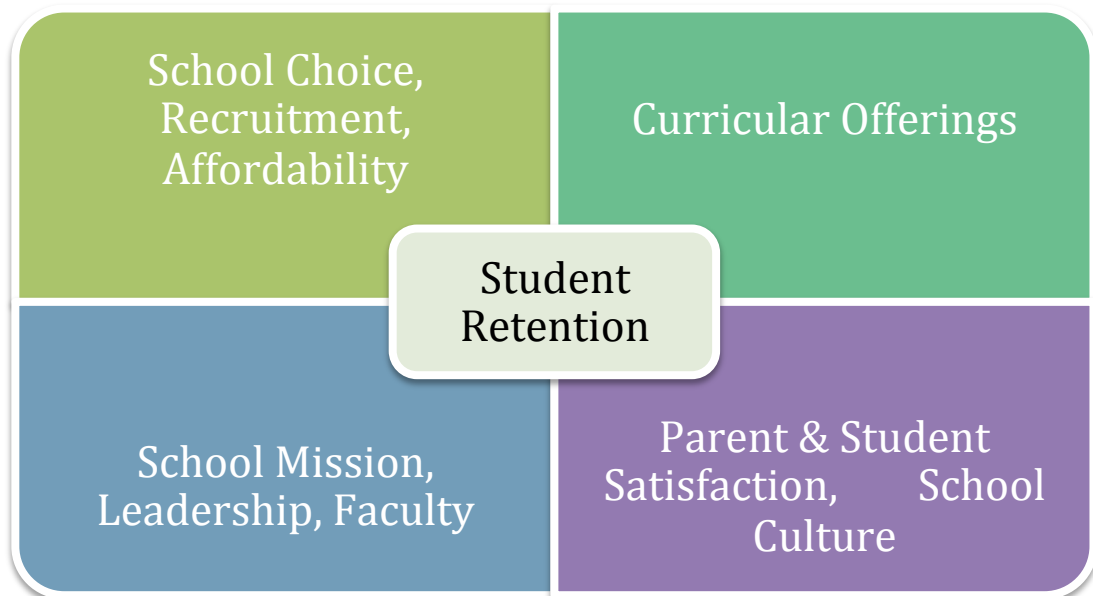
Figure 1. Model of factors affecting student retention and recruitment.

Importance of Study

The study is important for multiple reasons. The findings from this study may assist administrators in public, charter, and independent schools in determining what parents and students most value about their current school. School administrators could then implement practices and policies that encourage and maintain student enrollment and retention and recruitment throughout K-8 education. The aim of this study was to provide insight into factors that influence retention and recruitment and more effectively respond to the needs of parents at KDS.

In addition, this mixed-methods case study augmented existing research on student retention and recruitment with a particular emphasis on independent schools. Furthermore, this investigation may reveal a useful framework for future research in this field. Understanding the factors that influence retention and recruitment can inform policy makers and school administrators as to why parents initially choose to enroll and subsequently reenroll their children at a particular school. Examining how these variables change as students move from elementary to middle school can influence policy with respect to retention and recruitment practices and how to meet parents and students social and educational expectations.

The results of this study may inform administrators, board members, and other stakeholders of parents' perceptions regarding why they choose and stay at this independent school and how parents' perceptions may change, if at all, as their children move from elementary to middle school. By focusing on a mixed-methods case study of an independent school it is hoped that this study will add to existing research on factors influencing retention and recruitment in independent schools.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of terms have been proposed:

- Archival Documents: include exit interviews and email collected from September 2005 through June 2012.

- Administrators: Include the head of school, lower school head, chief operating officer, admissions director, development director, and head of Judaic studies. Administrators are responsible for the daily operation of the school.

- Alumnae: Any former student from 1978-2012.

- Attrition: A reduction or decrease in the number of eligible students who choose not to return. Attrition rates are measured yearly by the individual school and national organizations like NAIS and RAVSAK and are an important indicator of the well being of the school.

- Board members: The board is the guardian of the school's mission. It is the board's responsibility to ensure that the mission is relevant and vital to the community it serves and to monitor the success of the school in fulfilling its mission (NAIS, 2013). KDS currently has 13 members on the board of trustees. Each member is committed to the long-term success of the institution. Members of the board are responsible for raising revenue in the form of donations, interpreting the mission of the school and hiring the head of school. The board members are expected to act as leaders in the community, cultivate good relations with school constituents as well as the broader community, and demonstrate best practices with respect to equity and justice.

- Day school: Indicates that students are given instruction during the day, after which they return home in contrast to a boarding school where students live on campus. Day school can also indicate that the school offers a full day program as opposed to an after school or weekend program (Avi Chai, 2011).

- Factor of retention: One of the elements contributing to a parents decision to reenroll.

- Issues of retention: A point of matter of dispute raised by stakeholders regarding retention and recruitment.

- Independent school: Schools that are independent in governance and finance. Independent schools are free to define their own mission and establish their own expectations for teacher credentials and student performance (Florida Council of Independent Schools, 2011). The terms *private school* and *independent school* are often interchangeable. According to Kennedy (2008):

     An independent school receives no public funds. Tuition fees and gifts are the only source of an independent school's funding. Generally its board or trustees is detached from and independent from any other organization. For example, many parochial and religious schools are subsets of a parent governing body. While they may be deemed private schools, they are not independent schools per se. (p. 20)

- Lower school: Typically kindergarten through fourth grade.

- Middle school: Typically fifth through eighth grade constitute the middle school.

- Parochial schools: School supported by a religious body. In the United States, such schools are maintained by a number of religious groups, including

Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and evangelical
Protestant churches (Parochial school, n.d.).

- Pluralistic day school: Pluralism in the context of faith-based day School
  embraces the idea that there is more than one form of acceptable valid practice
  and tradition (Muszkat-Barkan, 2011).

- Retention: The act of holding or maintaining current student enrollment at KDS.

- School choice: The No Child Left Behind Act provides new education options for
  many families. This federal law allows parents to choose other public schools or
  take advantage of free tutoring if their child attends a school that needs
  improvement. Also, parents can choose another public school if the school their
  child attends is unsafe. The law also supports the growth of more independent
  charter schools, funds some services for children in private schools, and provides
  certain protections for homeschooling parents (U.S. Department of Education,
  2009).

- School records: KDS electronic or hard copy records of enrollment data and
  admissions data for KDS collected from September 2005-June 2012.

- Stakeholders: In this study, stakeholders refers to any parent, student, faculty
  member, board member, administrator, and members of the religious community
  of this city who are interested in a traditional education as a means to secure
  continuity of the faith-based culture, build connections with Israel, and provide an
  excellent education in a religious environment. Stakeholders include persons who
  donate money, time, and expertise to the school.

- Students: Children enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade at KDS.

- Transitional year: fourth grade (the last year of lower school).

- Tuition: Costs associated with sending a student to an independent school. Although actual tuition represents the largest amount, other required fees include class trips, books and supplies, homeroom fees, capital campaign, other annual giving, and all miscellaneous costs associated with independent education.

Assumptions

This study assumes that school records are accurate and well maintained and that participants' responses will be honest. To encourage honesty, dialogue during interviews and focus groups will be carried out in an informal and relaxed setting. Participation by school staff, school administration, school administrators, and parents will be by invitation and not mandatory. Those participating will be encouraged to express their personal feelings, experiences, and observations. In addition, this study assumes that retention and recruitment can be improved by policy changes or behavior of stakeholders and that findings and recommendations will provide insights affecting other independent schools.

This study also assumes that members of the school community are interested in the success of the school and would be interested in helping KDS move forward by providing suggestions for moving KDS from good to great and volunteering time and resources to improving the school. Research indicates that a community approach to problem solving is often more effective that a top down approach (Hiatt-Michael, 2012). Parents' that are able to connect with the school's culture through involvement in retention and recruitment will feel connected to the school's culture and with that

connection will come a feeling of stability Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003), which improves retention.

Parents and other stakeholders share a belief that KDS is a good school and that with a more organized effort; the school can improve its enrollment and recruitment. Parents who are invested in school improvement are likely to feel that they have a voice in the school and that they are being listened too. These parents will be more satisfied with their choice and more likely to remain enrolled (Hewitt-Edmond, 2009).

Limitations

This study is limited to its analysis of perceptions of parents, staff, and other stakeholders associated with KDS. Perceptions were gathered by focus groups, survey, interviews, and archival data. The population presented another limiting factor. This study dealt with families and staff associated with a Kindergarten through eighth grade urban, and faith-based independent school in the southwest. While generalizations may be made to the national population of accredited school staff and families, the findings may be a more accurate representation of nonpublic schools in the southwest.

Summary

One major goal of independent schools is to serve the educational needs of their constituents. When parents decide to re-enroll their children at a school, it is assumed to be a validation of the school's academic mission and evidence of their satisfaction. This chapter introduced the topic of student retention and recruitment and the need for further research on this topic in independent schools. To the extent that school administrators can accurately determine the factors that influence retention and recruitment, they can more effectively respond to the needs of parents.

In Chapter 2, the literature review will focus on an independent school's strategy by synthesizing historical background, attrition, and factors that affect retention and recruitment, including: financial aid, curriculum, school and community culture, parent, satisfaction, decision-making (policy) and its effects, and leadership. Information gained from reviewing the literature will lead to the formation of a framework that can be used to expand current knowledge of retention and recruitment in independent schools in this mixed-methods case study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review examined existing historical, theoretical, and empirical literature regarding the factors that affect attrition, retention, and recruitment of students and families attending independent schools. Factors that affect attrition, retention, and recruitment addressed in this literature review include parent satisfaction, culture, board decision (policy making and its effects), leadership, curriculum, and finances.

Historical Background

Thomas Jefferson is rightly given much credit for emphasizing the importance of education in a democracy. He believed that education for all to be crucial for the young democracy in the Americas to succeed (Bergstedt, n.d.). However, from the founding of the colonies in the Americas through the early part of the nineteenth century widespread systems of public schooling did not exist (Wilson, 2009). Schools were local or regional and were funded partially by the public but primarily through private institutions (Pegeas, 2006). As the country expanded, so too did its educational needs. Public and private schools also began to distinguish themselves from one another.

The nineteenth century saw this distinction first in Horace Mann's common school movement. Horace Mann was elected as the first secretary to the Massachusetts State Board of Education and began advocating for standardization in schools and curriculum. Mann saw public education as a vehicle for achieving what he felt was the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In order to accomplish standardization in curriculum across the country, it would be necessary to create a State Board of Education to replace local school boards (Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2009). In the 1830s,

the common-school movement, which it was later called, established the requirement for schools to be set up with a standardized curriculum and funded by local governments.

This standardization, which sought the greatest good for the greatest amount of people also created the need for more individualized education, which could only be provided by the private sector. One factor in this individualization was the industrial revolution. As the industrial revolution swept Europe and was transported to America, industry began to influence education, and business practices were imported into schools (Carden, 2005).

This standardization of education from the common school movement also renounced the funding of private schools, which had been, in part, funded by local governments and influenced the creation of compulsory education laws (Kaestle, 2008). Individual groups like the Catholic Church protested the standardized curriculum and felt this curriculum enforced values that threatened their beliefs.

The Catholic Church as well as other groups built their own schools, resisting intervention from the state. These private or independent schools, owned by churches, chartered corporations, and entrepreneurial individuals, competed for students who could afford the cost of tuition. Individualized curriculum was also set up so that it aligned with the individual group's educational goals and spiritual beliefs. In 1925, the Supreme Court guaranteed the constitutional right of private schools to exist alongside public schools and a parent's right to choose a private school (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*).

Private schools not only individualized their curriculums but were also used as a means to improve education. As private schools met consumer demands, enrollment increased and promoted efficiency, improvement, and variety. The perceived advantages

of private education led to a reconsideration of public funds for private schools. The
noted economist Milton Friedman in 1955 advocated for a voucher system that would
allow government to subsidize the cost of education and give parents more freedom in
choosing schools. In 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education
Act, which allowed remedial students to receive federal aid and opened the door of public
funding to private education. In the 1980s, school choice gained momentum with the
election of Ronald Regan. Regan agreed with Freidman's ideas but worked
unsuccessfully to provide vouchers for low performing students to attend private schools
(Friedman Foundation, n.d.).

School choice did not gain acceptance until the 1990s with the nation's first
voucher program, which was started in Wisconsin. Voucher schools were private schools
that could also be religious. Children with vouchers could enroll in private intuitions
whereupon the state would cover a portion of the tuition (Ravitch, 2010).

Currently, most American private schools are affiliated with religious
organizations and operate under the principles that religious instruction should represent
a significant portion of the daily curriculum (Pegeas, 2006). Private school, free from
government control, has small class size, and a common purpose. However, they often
vary greatly in regards to philosophy, mission, and methods. For example, the day school
philosophy emphasizes academic preparation within a secular environment (Kennedy,
2008). Montessori and Catholic schools also have a unique mission and purpose.

The philosophy and mission of faith-based private education exists to strengthen
life, leadership and learning of the religious community to ensure a vibrant Jewish future
(RAVSAK, n.d.). In 2008-2009, there were Jewish day schools in the United States, with

an enrollment of 228,174 students (Avi Chai, 2009). Jewish day schools were created in large numbers after World War II in response to dissatisfaction with public school education and a desire to build Jewish identity through a dual curriculum.

Introduction to Retention Issues

As private schools compete for students and resources, recruiting and retaining students becomes extremely important to the success of any private school. Researchers who explore student retention and recruitment tend to approach the process of selecting students and retaining them in three ways. The first set of researchers looked at retention and recruitment through the lens of attrition (Rootman, 1972; Spady, 1971; Tinto & Cullen, 1973), student participation (Beal & Noel, 1979; Bean, 1980; Walters & McCay, 2005), and looked at retention in relation to action plans implemented to retain students. These studies focused on attrition and retention at the college level. Because there is little research on retention in private primary and middle schools, these studies were used as a starting point.

A second set of researchers looked at retention through the lens of community and school culture (Goodwin, 2005; Lindsey et al., 2003; Schein, 2006). School and community culture begin with how the school culture fits with the students goals and the assumption that different schools best serve different types of students (Zarybnisky, 2010). In order to attract and retain students, that will be successful in these private schools, leaders must design schools to reflect the community and culture that students want (Schein, 2006).

A third set of researchers examined retention through parent satisfaction (Hewitt-Edmond, 2009; Ravitch, 2010; Zarybnisky, 2010); Parents who perceive that the school

is meeting their expectations build trust and feel less need to be involved at school (Sgro, 2006). On the other hand, when parents perceive that the school does not meet their expectations, they un-enroll their children from the school. Gallanter (1994) states, "Parents transferred their children when they lost faith in the school's ability to serve their children" (p. 284). These sets of studies have been used to examine factors affecting retention.

Attrition

The study of retention begins with the study of attrition. Students and their families choose not to re-enroll for various reasons. Some of these reasons are outside of the school's control. Specifically, students who graduate or move away are not considered eligible for re-enrollment. Attrition however, deals with the percentage of students who are eligible to re-enroll and do not. These students may leave school for many reasons, such as financial constraints, poor institutional fit, or lack of academic success.

Rootman's (1972) study created a model to predict the voluntary withdrawal from a military academy. He studied attrition by looking at the degree of interpersonal fit with the institution and the fit of the individual and other students. In his study, Rootman concluded that personality, interests, and values of the student must be aligned and that to the degree that "the commonality that exists among these variables is that they can be indicators of the degree of fit between individual and the organization" (p. 149). Rootman also concluded that the perception of getting along with classmates and inclusion by so-called insiders could be used to predict whether or not a student would remain enrolled.

Spady (1971) who studied dropout in community college concluded as Rootman that attrition was influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships. He also listed factors including family, previous educational background, academic potential, friendship support, intellectual development, and institutional commitment as factors that affect a student's decision to leave a school. However, whereas Rootman believed that dropout was a function the quality of interpersonal relationships, Spady concluded that dropout decisions were primarily based on a student's lack of academic success.

Bean (1980) studied dropout rates in community college and developed a casual model of student attrition. Bean stated that "Institutional commitment was the most important variable in explaining dropout for students" (p. 29) and that institutional commitment was based on the student's perceived quality of education. Bean found that men and women left for different reasons and that faculty should be aware of the differing needs of male and female students. Based on his study, Bean concluded that attrition would be reduced by admitting students based on a high grade point average.

Another factor that relates to student attrition is the perceived quality of the school's culture. Researchers believe that the success of an organization is based on its culture (Goodwin, 2005; Schein, 2006). Students who feel the school has a strong sense of community, which includes a predictable and supportive environment improves student satisfaction and retention (John Hopkins School of Public Health, 2005).

While other researchers mentioned previously looked at the student behaviors for clues to retention, Tinto (2006) looked at institutional action and program implementation by the school and by teachers as a means of reducing student attrition. Tinto studied what the school could do to encourage success in retention opposed to simply

understanding why students leave. In his study, teacher involvement was a key factor in retaining students. Tinto stated, "That the actions of the faculty, especially in the classroom, are key to institutional efforts to enhance student retention" (p. 5).

Beal and Noel (1979) studied 979 institutions that were surveyed regarding what works in student retention and reduces attrition. These researchers concluded that action plans that targeted high risk and under achieving students were found to be successful in improving retention. Action plans included student counseling, career assistance, faculty training, and expanded orientation for incoming students. Tinto (2006) too identified that the school played a significant role in reducing attrition.

Walters and McCay (2005) also believed that the school had a significant role in reducing student attrition and that reducing attrition and improving retention should be part of the schools strategic plan. Walters and McCay's research indicated that any serious attempt by the school to improve retention would have to include institutional change and that this change would need to be systematic and overseen by a schools governing board since school institutions are "curiously inflexible" (p. 53). The following begins with the historical, theoretical, and empirical review of research regarding attrition.

Overview of historical and theoretical studies. Bean (1980) synthesized previous research into a model that distinguished the classes of variables that are used in the study of student attrition. Bean also identified a theoretical model of attrition that would be helpful when the number of students enrolling in an institution is expected to decrease, and suggested that keeping matriculated students enrolled is a matter of

institutional survival. Bean identified 22 variables that were presumed to be important

predictors of drop out. These variables include the following:

- Parent's education level

- High school grades

- Achievement scores

- Opportunity to transfer

- Family approval

- Likelihood of marrying

- Practical value

- Boredom

- Confidence

- Certainty of school choice

- Loyalty to the institution

- Major certainty

- Educational goals

- Absenteeism

- Close friends

- Informal contact with faculty

- Grades

- Membership in campus organizations

- Availability of preferred courses

- Discussion about leaving with insiders and outsiders

- Intention to leave

Bean (1980) theorized from Durkheim's earlier work, and in common with Spady (1970), that when a person shares values with a group, this person is less likely to drop out of school and that a person who has friendship support is less likely to drop out of school. He summarized that drop out varies inversely with the degree of integration of social groups which the individual is involved with. Pope added that drop out would be decreased only when students shared values and friendship within the school (as cited in Bean, 1980). Additionally, Durkheim looked at the amount of regulation that existed in a person's life. He concluded that students who remained enrolled were able to balance academics, social, and physical needs while at school. Students who were not able to find balance were more likely to drop out (as cited in Bean, 1980).

Adding to the work of earlier authors, Rootman (1972) also looked at importance of socialization and its relationship to attrition. Spady (1970) theorized that shared values, grade performance, and friendship would increase institutional commitment and reduce the likelihood of drop out. Rootman looked at interpersonal fit (social support) and intrapersonal fit (friendship) as significant factors in attrition and found, as did Spady, that interpersonal and intrapersonal fit would decrease attrition.

Tinto (1975), Tinto and Cullen (1973), and Spady (1970) selectively used Durkheim's theories to build their models of student attrition. Durkeim's work centered on predicting suicide and looked at breaking one's ties with a social system and the lack of integration into common life of that society as causes for suicide. Spady agreed with Rootman (1972) that academic integration corresponded with support by friends and shared values with the institution. In his model increased social integration led to retention. Tinto's model looked at how family background, individual characteristics,

and educational background interact with each other in predicting institutional commitment. Tinto hypothesized that individual commitment to achieving goals would lead to better grades, would lead to academic integration, would lead to academic success, and would reduce the likelihood of dropping out.

Whereas other researchers looked at socialization as a predictor of attrition, Boshier (1973) studied personnel motivation as the determining factor in student attrition. Boshier looked at student attrition and identified a lack of personal motivation as a significant factor in student attrition. Boshier theorized that when a student's self image was not consistent with what the student perceived his role should be the result would be incompatible that the perceived relationship between a student and teacher and the institution was a significant factor in student attrition.

As Boshier (1973) looked to personal motivation, Tinto (1975) and Tinto and Cullen (1973) theorized that family characteristics also played a role in personal motivation and influenced institutional commitment and attrition. In Tino and Cullen's study, personal motivation and family characteristics could be used to study the process of drop out. For Tinto and Cullen, dropout was seen as a "multidimensional process based on the interaction between the individual and the institution" (p. 41). Tinto and Cullen developed a model that looked at individual and family attributes, the academic system, and goal commitment as predictors of drop out.

Overview of two empirical studies. A recent study looked at attrition in private schools and found that reasons cited as the determining factor for students not returning included—in the order of most-mentioned to least—student preference, philosophical differences, lack of extra-curricular activities, and academic concerns (Geyser, n.d.).

Improving retention and lowering attrition has a direct impact on an independent school's budget. Financially, it costs less to retain a student than it does to recruit a student (Beal & Noel, 1979). In 2002 NAIS conducted a survey that compared schools with low attrition with schools with high attrition rates. NAIS member school reported several significant variables were present in low attrition schools (Mitchell & Galindo, 2002).

- Quality teachers and support: Schools with higher paid, more experienced teachers with graduate degrees are more likely to see lower attrition rates. One common misconception is the amount schools charge for tuition and fees. Low attrition schools have an average tuition of about 11% greater than high attrition schools.

- Student support: Schools that have a full-time director of diversity and schools that have a full-time psychologist are much more likely to experience low attrition than schools that do not have those full-time positions. Schools with full-time directors of financial aid also see a positive effect on retention.

- Teacher to student ratios and role models: Low attrition schools tend to have a slightly higher student-to-teacher ratio than do high attrition schools. Schools that have more teachers of color in the presence of students of color suggest a positive effect on retention.

- Technology focus: Schools that spend a larger percentage of their operating expenses on technology are more likely to see lower attrition rates.

- Tuition, financial aid, and endowment: Schools in the low attrition category have the highest average tuition but their tuition-dependency (i.e., tuition revenue as a

percentage of total income) is lowest. Low attrition schools are more likely to offset the tuition with more financial aid grants. Low attrition schools also have the highest endowment value per student.

- Boarding versus day school: Boarding schools are almost three times more likely (and boarding-day schools are about twice as likely) to be among high attrition schools than day schools are.

- School size: In terms of both enrollment numbers and physical space, the size of a school suggests a relationship to attrition. The larger the size of a school's enrollment, the more likely it is to experience lower attrition. Also, schools with low attrition rates tend to have less square footage per student than do schools experiencing high attrition rates.

- Location: Schools located in the Southeast, Southwest, and Midwest are more likely to see high attrition while schools located in the West, Middle Atlantic, and East tend to see lower attrition.

Retention

While attrition relates to eligible students who elect not to return, retention or re-enrollment relates to the students who elect to stay at the school they are currently attending. The focus of this section will examine retention. As schools shift their focus from why students leave to why they stay enrolled, schools can build on their success and improve consistent and predictable enrollment. As schools retain more students, once they are admitted, enrollment will hold steady. Previously, this study examined why students choose to leave a school. This study will also examine previous research related to why students elect to remain enrolled.

Historical. In the days of large application pools and few school choices, many schools were only mildly interested in retention. New student admissions maintained or increased total enrollments, and hardly anyone asked where have all the students gone? The situation is changing now, changing too rapidly for most schools. Admissions figures, while bolstered to a degree by new students, are showing the effects of the population decline. Retention has become the counterweight for sagging enrollment (Beal & Noel, 1979).

Theoretical. Many of the earlier researchers, focused on the characteristics of different of students at a given institution, with an emphasis on describing the nature and categories of successful graduates. When there was an increase in attrition, new students would need to make up an increasing percentage of student body. Now, however the current emphasis is on retaining students who have enrolled (Beal & Noel, 1979).

In order for student retention programs to be successful administrative support is essential. Beal and Noel (1979) report that student retention "is highest when a position is created to coordinate the retention effort" (p. 98). Students also leave because of lack of knowledge about the institution and its offerings. "In instances such as these, it is largely a matter of informing students that the school has what they want or has procedures for accommodating changed needs" (p. 111).

Furthermore, Walters and McCay (2005) suggested that retention should be addressed in strategic planning of schools and that the responsibility for directing retention efforts was the responsibility of the top administrator. Primarily, administration should provide overall direction and responsibility for the strategic plan and "most importantly, be committed making sure the policy is clearly articulated to every level of

the organization through divisional and department structures down to the individual

employee" (Walters & McKay, 2005, p. 59).

Additionally, Mitchell (2003) included resource allocation as a responsibility of

administration in influencing retention. Mitchell states, "School leaders might also

consider the operational patterns of those schools most successful at student retention" (p.

60). Mitchell (2003) and Raymond (2007) identified similar school characteristics that

influenced retention. They included teacher salaries, technology, supporting students

outside the classroom, and enhanced learning for both students and teachers. "When it

comes to resource allocation using the attrition lens can help school leaders see more

clearly which choice might best help a school enhance its success" (Mitchell, 2003, p.

60).

Raymond (2007) also studied retention instead of attrition. His research studied

the practices of low income students who attend private schools. As with other

researchers, his recommendations included financial aid and affordability as important

factors in retaining these students. He concluded that clarity in school mission and

meaningful fundraising was essential in retaining these students. As the study of

retention continued, Sykes (1996) surveyed heads of school and found eleven important

factors that influenced retention.

Sykes (1996) noted 11 factors that influence retention:

1. Faculty/staff interaction

2. Meeting individual needs

3. Student activities

4. Curriculum

5. Financial aid

6. Admissions

7. Campus facilities and resources

8. Athletics

9. Housing (boarding school)

10. Choice of roommate (boarding school)

11. Orientation

In addition to these factors, Sykes (1996) found that the retention rate for students is closely related to the perceptions of parents regarding the value of the education their children are receiving at a particular school. However, Sykes (1996) and Tinto (2006) also suggest, in contrast to Bean (1980), that retention programs are not effective. Sykes states that the "concept of a learning community in which all members share the same vision and responsibility for learning and personal growth" (p. 99) is a more effective means of improving retention. In order to improve retention, Sykes makes four additional recommendations:

1. Evaluate the school for a sense of community

2. Provide faculty and staff training for improved retention

3. Clearly define the student best served by the school

4. The admission office must lead by having responsibility for both retention and recruitment

However, Walters and McCay (2005) concluded that faculty and academic rigor was the deciding factor in retention. Parents who rated their satisfaction as average and below listed a lack of faculty care and concern for students, faculty subject matter

expertise, and academic rigor as significant areas of concern. There is a high expectation on the part of all respondents in Carden's (2005) study that there is an expectation among all parents that their children will attend college and this was a primary reason for enrolling in a private school. Carden states, "The school partners with the parents to provide academic excellence for its students" (p. 78).

Additionally, families who re-enrolled listed faculty care and concern, individual attention, academic rigor, appropriate class size, safety, and faculty expertise as important factors in their re-enrollment decision process in private schools (Carden, 2005; ISM, 2010b). Other reported factors included quantity and quality of academic offerings, advisory programs, college counseling, charter education, and technology for students, extracurricular variety, sports offerings variety, social opportunities for students, school home communication, campus facilities, social issues in class, distance from home, and sibling at another school (ISM, 2010b). The role of parents is important. Sgro (2006) states, "more parent involvement means better retention" (p. 85). Institutional fit is significant as well; therefore clarity in school mission is also an important factor in student retention (Beal & Noel, 1979).

Empirical. As schools address the factors that contribute to student retention, action plans (Beal & Noel, 1979) based on addressing these factors were found to improve retention in community colleges. These plans targeted specific groups of students (new students, struggling students, high risk students) and looked at goal clarification, learning support, and expanded orientation. One successful action plan looked at student drop out and added transition programs that included counseling and tutoring for incoming students. These actions programs were found to have a positive

impact on retention. Researchers discovered that a school could improve retention by addressing specific student concerns through action programs. In order to implement these action plans, (Beal & Noel, 1979) found that when the school had a specific person or department tasked with identifying student issues and addressing them, student retention improved. The study also found that retention plans were successful when assignments regarding these actions plans were given to faculty (Beal & Noel, 1979).

In addition to action plans that addressed retention factors within targeted groups Beal and Noel agreed with previous research (Raymond, 2007; Sykes, 1996) and found financial considerations were secondary to factors like environmental characteristics and interactions between students and the institution (teachers). However, Gallanter (1994), did find that families who leave private education do so for cost and convenience.

Factors that Affect Retention in Independent Schools

Action plans that address specific factors have been found to improve retention in schools (Beal & Noel, 1979). In this section the factors to be explored are financial considerations, including financial aid, curriculum, culture, parent satisfaction, and leadership.

Financial. Non public school enrollment is increasing (Hollenbeck 2008). In private schools parents are consumers and schools compete for students based on providing maximum performance and widest appeal. Financial considerations help to ensure efficiency as well as equity. Parents who can afford tuition have more choice and express more satisfaction with their schools. So, can schools price themselves out of today's market? ISM's (2010c) answer, not if you understand and act on the relationships among pricing, customer service, marketing, and strategic planning.

According to NAIS, cost is a major consideration in determining school choice. These costs range from free for public school to $14,000 for independent school tuition in this area. Research indicates that families in the top 12% of income levels can afford average day school without financial aid (NAIS, 2013). Tuition for private religious schools is less expensive than independent non-religious schools and is usually a significant factor in school selection, especially with parents of multiple children (Gallanter, 1994).

Because independent schools do not have complicated revenue streams and few cost centers in which to adjust (downward), they must look at tuition as their primary source of their operating cost. However, according to Independent School Management (ISM, 2010b), schools are primarily mission-driven organizations, and parents choose (and stay) at schools for a variety of reasons including academic, social, and character-building aspects. Families leave when they are dissatisfied with the quality of the faculty's work with their child. To parents of secular independent schools and larger faith-based day schools, at least, it seems financial considerations are not a significant issue (ISM, 2010b). However, a conflicting report from RAVSAK expresses that for families who choose a religious day school education, affordability is a significant concern (RAVSAK, n.d.). In particular, smaller schools report that financial considerations continue to be a significant factor in student retention (RAVSAK, n.d.).

Affordability for parents may be an important factor in retaining students. Setting tuition and the issue of affordability is a primary responsibility for the board of trustees. Currently there are two predominant models. The NAIS model advocates controlling costs and reducing tuition. Basset (2007) states, "schools must seek ways to significantly

reduce tuition or at least moderate increases if they have any hope of attracting more families into the independent school fold" (p. 1).

The ISM (2010a) position is that school admission should be mission driven and that affordability is not a primary goal of independent schools. Consequently, independent schools should charge the full cost of what it costs to educate its students. Specifically, private schools in general are populated by students from affluent families and not primarily from middle-income families, and financial aid exists fundamentally to assure full enrollment of students who fit the school's mission. It does not exist fundamentally to increase socioeconomic diversity. Financial aid is a function of strategic planning. If more scholarship funds are necessary and school mission appropriate, these funds should be addressed through the budgeting process (ISM, 2010c).

Financial aid. Too often parents choose to discontinue enrollment because of financial considerations (Sykes, 1996). Financial aid comes in the form of student loans, funded scholarship, unfunded scholarships (discounting), and payment plans. Providing financial aid for students who attend private schools has a history as long as private education. Financial aid may be awarded for various reasons including merit- based scholarships for academics and athletics but most often is need-based (Raymond, 2007). Adequate financial aid is an important factor in attracting and retaining students.

One model for determining financial aid expressed by Independent School Management (2010c) of school is to charge parents the full cost of what it costs to educate its students. Families who are accepted are expected to pay full tuition. The school then uses financial aid to achieve economic or diversity goals and is part of

development and strategic planning. Substantial financial aid budgets and significant increases in those budgets to compensate for large tuition increases are usually the rules of thumb (Bassett, 2007). Another model is for schools to seek ways to significantly reduce tuition or at least moderate increases. Since 65% to 75% of school budgets are allocated to salaries and benefits, this is done by reducing staff and/or increase class sizes. Families who value independent education will sacrifice if necessary to pay for it and/or find alternative resources to pay for it rather than income: second mortgages, grandparents, et cetera.

Although financial considerations like financial aid are important other factors affect retention as well. Parents choose Independent schools because they feel these academic Institutions and will give their children an advantage. According to the *Economist,* the main commodity that elite schools are selling is an edge in university admissions (Private schools, 2009). With 20% to 40% of the freshmen classes of the highly selective colleges and universities coming from independent schools, these schools are wildly and disproportionately successful in delivering on the "college-prep" promise (Bassett, 2007). In both America and Britain the gap in performance between state and private education is wide. The main commodity that elite schools in the two countries are selling is an edge in university admissions. In America, private schools offer knowledge of the ins and outs of selective universities' admission methods, and carefully cultivated relationships with their admissions tutors (Private schools, 2009).

However, parents who choose schools because of affordability and college acceptance look to the school to provide an enriched curriculum and high academic achievement. According to Independent School Management (2010b), academic

achievement is an important competency in retention. Parents want to know that their child will have options after she/he leaves the school. Does the school have a culture of excellence (Private schools, 2009)? Dissatisfaction with school's programs and services (10.4%), and dissatisfaction with the school environment (4.2%) are frequently cited as reasons for voluntary attrition (ISM, 2010b; Mitchell & Galindo, 2002). Research indicates that there is a common belief that private schools produce better results than their public school counters parts (Rothstein, Carnoy, & Benveniste, 1999). Independent school teachers and administrators are more accountable to parents (Hewitt-Edmond, 2009):

- Independent schools are better than public schools at defining and specifying academic expectations for students;
- Independent schools are better than public schools at defining and specifying expectations for behavior and shared values for students;
- Independent schools spend a greater proportion of their resources to such nonacademic objectives;
- Independent schools have more efficient teacher selection and retention policies than do public schools, and are less hindered by cumbersome procedures and protections such as unions and can thus maintain higher teacher standards;
- Independent schools achieve their academic success;
- Independent schools achieve their academic success following curricular materials that do not significantly differ in standard subjects from those used in public schools;

- Independent schools develop practices and innovations that can, when adopted, improve performance at competing schools.

Independent schools have the freedom to tailor the curriculum and educational perspective to fit the needs of the community it serves. Independent schools are more likely to take advantage of cultural bonds than public schools. They also display significantly stronger communal ties among their members (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994).

With the freedom to tailor its curriculum, high attrition schools have a better opportunity to retain some of the students they lose, particularly through enhancing financial aid and reassessing their academic programs (or improving the process of matching students with the school's offerings (NAIS, 2012). It is particularly noteworthy that among high attrition schools, the reasons for student departures were spread relatively evenly—students left because they didn't like the academic program at nearly the same rate as those who felt they could not afford it (NAIS, n.d.).

Another important factor that affects retention is a commitment and access to technology. Schools that spend a larger percentage of their operating expenses on technology are more likely to see lower attrition rates. This is borne out by the fact that low attrition schools have a lower number of students per computer than high attrition schools. Slight correlations can be found between attrition rates and the degree to which schools spend on technology and provide computer access to students. NAIS (n.d.) reports that schools that spend the least on technology experience the highest attrition.

School and community culture. Lindsey et al. (2003) looked at culture as a significant factor in a schools success. As students look for institutional fit, culture of the

organization and the student's ability to fit in is essential. Lindsey et al. believed that culture was also a factor in the success of the organization and looked at how a culture assesses itself. Lindsey et al. found that success could be measured by determining community's values and managing the differences between the people as significant issues in an organizations success. Beal and Noel (1979), as well as Walters and McKay (2005), found that an institution's ability to adapt to help students adapt to school culture was a significant factor in retention.

Additionally, perceived quality is based on a school's culture (Goodwin, 2005; Schein, 2006). Students who felt the school had a strong sense of community, which included a predictable and supportive environment influenced student satisfaction and improved retention (ISM, 2010b).

School culture and community are complex subjects and often misunderstood. However, understanding these in the context of retention is crucial for stability in an organization (Davis, 1984). Researchers agree generally that culture relates to a school's day to day operating principles, basic assumptions, and values (Davis, 1984; Hernandez, 1996; Kottkamp, 1984; Schein, 2006). In essence, a school's culture is its personality. Culture also implies stability. Lindsey et al. (2003) state, "everything you believe, and everything you do that enables you to identify with people who are like you and that distinguishes you from people who are different from you" (p. 41).

When examining independent school culture, we begin with the idea that different schools suit different types of learners (Zarybnisky, 2010). School setting or culture is often manifested in the alignment of the parent's educational philosophy with the school's philosophy. Johnson (1987) states, "conditions related to size, autonomy,

selectivity, and stability of private schools encourage a reliance on cultural cohesion rather than rational rules to hold school together" (p. 418). Schools that attend to issues of culture and institutional fit are often the schools that are successful (Goodwin, 2005).

When looking at culture in schools, there are distinct differences in the way parents perceive the culture in public and private schools. Although these assumptions are not in fact true, parents assume that public schools have more students with limited English proficiency, racially and ethnically diverse student populations, more students learning issues, and larger class size.

Private schools on the other hand have fewer minority teachers and principals who are paid less, more satisfied with their working conditions, more influential regarding curriculum, have more autonomy in the classroom, are safer, have more parent involvement, share a greater sense of community within their schools, and have more rigorous academic programs (Choy, 1997).

The importance of understanding a school's culture can make the difference between student educational success and failure. When looking at the basic beliefs of a school, what is learned is that this process occurs while solving issues and problems. As the group works on issues and finds solutions, a common practice is established and taught to new members of the group (Schein, 2006). As schools organize themselves around these assumptions, a variety of beliefs, in addition to academic outcomes, will reinforce as well as add to the culture in the school. Some of these issues may include religious beliefs, safety, or discipline (Hewitt-Edmond, 2009). Cultural fit is not only essential for the student but for the parent as well. Since mothers usually make the

decision on school choice, it is equally important for the parent to feel the institutional fit (Carden, 2005).

Sykes (1996) listed six indicators of a healthy school community

1. All stakeholders share a common sense of school mission

2. Healthy adult relationships role models within the school community

3. Clear expectations

4. A balance of work and play

5. Tolerance for differences and respect for each individual

6. Shared values

Parent Satisfaction

Hewitt-Edmond (2009) looked at customer satisfaction as a way to improve retention. Specifically, "that customer's expectations and customer satisfaction is established through meeting or exceeding those needs" (p. 1). Parents from private schools view a quality education as a long-term investment. They are not looking only to provide a quality education but to help their children achieve success as adults. Private school is seen as an investment in their children's future, as noted by Hewitt-Edmond. Sgro (2006) believed that parent satisfaction could be determined by parent participation and need for involvement in school. As parents became more satisfied with the value of education they would feel less need to become involved in school issues.

As parents try to determine satisfaction with the school they look for specific qualities. Gallanter (1994) listed 10 factors:

- Grade range of the school

- Student body size

- Tuition

- Class size

- School site size

- School location

- Faculty qualifications

- Preferential admission for siblings

- Curriculum

- Transportation

In contrast, Sykes (1996) listed nine factors in determining parent satisfaction:

- Admissions

- Athletics

- Campus facilities

- Curriculum

- Financial aid

- Student/teacher interaction

- Student orientation

- Perception of meeting student needs

- School activities

Zarybnisky (2010) list was narrowed to three important factors, "parents value discipline, socialization, and interaction with the classroom teacher" (p. 88). Thus, research in the area of student satisfaction has identified many factors that contribute to low attrition. However, these findings consistently indicate that it is impossible to isolate a single cause for attrition. Work by Beal and Noel (1979) indicates that improved

retention is possible when school administrators develop an action plan that responds to a specific retention issue associated with that campus (Beal & Noel, 1979). These action plans were most successful when working in the areas of academic enrichment or support and involvement experiences directed by other students. Action plans included:

- Faculty awareness and development activities

- Learning support

- Career assistance programs

- Orientation and peer programs

- Student advising

Action plans improved retention of students and were particularly successful when focused on new students, those students the school considered high risk and low performing. Although research indicates that action plans are successful in improving retention, available research on student retention and enrollment deals exclusively with junior colleges and universities. The need for understanding retention in private schools is even more acute. At this time few administrators at independent schools have a data driven approach to retention based on their institutions' unique needs (Sykes, 1996).

Parent satisfaction is an important factor to consider when looking at student retention. For the most part Independent schools enjoy a 96% satisfaction rate (Council for American Private Education, 2002). Parents draw on their own educational experiences when making decisions about their children's education. Independent schools increase the satisfaction of their stakeholders by determining what they value in an educational experience for their children. Research indicates that schools organize themselves around a variety of principles different from academic outcomes, principles

such as religious beliefs, safety, or discipline in order to attract specific types of families (Hewitt-Edmond, 2009). These parents look not only at the expressed satisfaction of their children but also their own satisfaction regarding the school their children attend. In fact, families in higher-income schools tend to choose teachers who are good at promoting both student and parent satisfaction (Jacob & Lefgren, 2005).

Parents express many reasons for school satisfaction. According to research conducted by NAIS (n.d.), parents who chose private schools for their children are more satisfied with those schools than other parents. This is based on several factors including the assumption that private school students are being better prepared academically than there public school counterparts. Satisfaction comes from being able to choose a school that matches family needs and interests. Families look for a community connection and this connection is established by a strong teacher-student relationship (Dougherty, 2008).

Based on survey findings by Choy (1997), parents ranked academics, facility services, faith values, safety, and convenience as the five most important values in their child's school. However, most often teacher to student ratio is listed as the most important factor in school choice satisfaction. Parents also listed the services offered and communication with parents as reasons for school choice satisfaction (Choy, 1997).

Social capital is an important factor in parent satisfaction (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). Peterson also introduced the concept of social capital in school choice settings. Essentially, social capital is "the resources that are generated by accidental interactions among adults in a well-functioning community" (p. 21). Parents are more satisfied with their children's schools when they feel they are part of successful or important

community. As parents become more involved in the education of their children,

satisfaction tends to increase.

The Fifth Factor is Leadership

      Board decision (policy) making and its effects. Public and private school share

a common goal in educating children. Independent schools differ in management and

philosophy with each independent school free to decide its own mission and purpose.

The body responsible for determining and continuing the mission and purpose is the

board of trustees. Independent schools have an advantage over public schools in that

Independent school leaders reinforce cultural bonds more effectively than their public

school counterparts (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Hernandez, 1996). Trustees not only

determine the school's mission, vision, strategic goals, and policy positions, they must

also be able and willing to articulate the mission in formal and informal situations (NAIS,

2013). Hernandez (1996) states, "The primary driving influence for creating and

maintaining organizational culture is the leadership" (p. 5).

      The school's mission. Mission offers more than a concept; it provides focus and

clear direction. The mission statement defines the qualities of the people the school seeks

for its community—families and students, board, faculty and staff, and describes each

school in ways that is distinct. Successful schools have a well defined purpose and set of

beliefs, which is clearly articulated. These values are communicated in qualitative terms

and are communicated clearly throughout the school. Additionally, a good mission

statement is easy to memorize, clear and challenging, inspires confidence, is genuine, and

empowers students and faculty (ISM, 2010c; Walner, 2000).

Governance. The power structure in an independent school has several parts. The board of trustees primarily works on strategic issues like finance and hiring the head of school. The head of school and other school administrators determine the day-to-day operating decisions. The faculty and administration are responsible for curriculum (Bassett, 2007). An effective board understands a school's mission and history and works to move the mission of the school forward. Board members come from many different constituencies but generally need to have skills and personal qualities that contribute to the combination of work, willingness, wealth, and wisdom required to keep a school moving forward (ISM, 2010c).

Board size differs depending on the school but the average number of voting trustees is 17.5 and is made up of current and former parents, alumnae, funders of the school, and occasionally, although not voting members, students and faculty. Boards have three primary responsibilities; fiduciary, strategic, and generative (NAIS, 2013). Boards are concerned with the stewardship of tangible assets. Strategic: Boards create a strategic partnership with management. Generative: Boards provide a less recognized but critical source of leadership for the organization. The board has one employee and that is the head of school (NAIS, 2013).

The head of school. Successful boards are those that have a strong partnership with the head of school. This begins with understanding how the roles work together and differ. Successful boards understand their different responsibilities and support the head in leading and managing the school. Together the board chair and head articulate the school's mission and vision. Together they, along with the treasurer, oversee resource allocation. Together they serve on all committees as members ex officio or "ex officio

without a vote." The head is the professional, institutional, and educational leader of the school and he or she is authorized to oversee all administration. The head serves in the same capacity a CEO would in a for-profit corporation. The head works with board and staff to implement board policies. The head has complete authority for faculty, staff, and student selection, evaluation, and dismissal. The head keeps the board informed about decisions in all these areas. The head is responsible along with the financial officer (if any) and the treasurer of the board for developing and monitoring the organization's budget (NAIS, 2013).

Independent schools rely on the board of trustees to set the mission and ensure the financial viability of their schools. The Head of school is their sole employee and is the person ultimately responsible to see that the mission is carried out and is tasked with running the school and seeing to its success. When considering the head's role in retaining and recruiting students it is important to consider effective leadership.

Much has been written and continues to be about the subject of leadership. Leadership quality is centered on the idea that effective leaders know themselves. Effective leaders need to understand, find, describe, and apply their strengths. Great organizations accommodate and capitalize on people's differences (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Many effective leaders also use tests that help them identify strengths weaknesses, and measure their skill set against a leadership standard: Myers-Briggs (MBTI), Fundamental Interpersonal Relations (FIRO-B), and Strength Finder. These instruments tap into key aspects of personality and behavior in areas such as communication, problem solving, decision making, and interpersonal relations. Together

they complement each other and provide information that leader's use in their personal, ongoing leadership development (Schnell, 2011).

Emotional intelligence. Effective leaders do many things. Prioritizing these tasks and showing results is often the difference between success and failure. One important finding on leadership shows that effective leaders use multiple leadership styles within a given week depending on the situation. Like golf clubs in a bag, result-driven leaders use these skills when needed. Understanding your leadership styles and how to adapt these styles is another trait of effective leadership. A random sample of 3,871 executives from 20,000 executive worldwide found six distinct leadership styles: (a) coercive: demand compliance, (b) authoritative: mobilize toward a vision, (c) affiliative: create emotional harmony, (d) democratic: build consensus, (e) pacesetting: expect excellence and self direction, and (f) coaching: develop people for the future. These are related to components of emotional intelligence (the ability to manage ourselves and our relationships effectively). Leaders who master multiple styles—especially authoritative, democratic, affiliative, and coaching—have the best climate for performance (Goleman, 2000).

Emotional intelligence improves results. Research shows that a leader's mood plays a key role in that dynamic (Goleman, 2000). Effective leaders display moods and behaviors depending on what is needed in a particular situation. Leaders must first attend to the impact of their own mood and behaviors before moving on to his wide panoply of other critical responsibilities. Goleman (2000) lists the following attributes as important:

- Self awareness: the ability to read your own emotions.

- Self-management: ability to control your emotions and act honestly in reliable and adaptable ways.

- Social awareness: empathy and organizational intuition.

- Relationship management: ability to communicate clearly and convincingly, disarm conflicts, and build strong emotional bonds.

A leader's mood is quite literally contagious. Research indicates that when the leader is in a happy mood, based in reality, the people around view everything in a positive light, that in turn makes optimistic about achieving their goals, enhances creativity and efficiency and predisposes them to be helpful. We rely on connections with other people to determine our moods. The more we act a certain way-be it happy, depressed, or cranky-the more the behavior becomes ingrained in our brain circuitry, and the more we will continue to feel that way. Who do I want to be? Who am I now? How do I get from here to there? Who can help me? (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2001; Zander & Zander, 2000).

Organizational politics. These are informal, unofficial, and sometimes behind the scene efforts to sell ideas, influence an organization, increase power, or achieve other targeted objectives. Effective leaders are able to successfully manage organizational politics. Many leaders claim politics are not important. Meanwhile, unhealthy politics stagnate, decay, and destroy the organization. The power of ideas (less political) versus the power-of-personality (more political) both can be successful if not overdone. The power of ideas people run the risk of being ignored and underappreciated while the

power-of-personality people run the risk compromising their ethics and falling prey to naked self-interest (Brandon & Seldman, 2004).

Know the culture of your school. Bolman and Deal (2002) stress the importance of understanding an organization's culture in order to be effective. A school's culture can be understood by examining the political, human resource, structural, and symbolic lenses. Private schools have an advantage over public schools in that private school leaders reinforce cultural bonds more effectively than their public school counterparts (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Hernandez, 1996; Schein, 2006). The primary driving influence for creating and maintaining a successful organizational culture is leadership (Hernandez, 1996; Kottkamp, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1984).

Principle centered leadership. Covey (1990) in *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*, the Arbinger Institute (2006) in *The Anatomy of Peace*, and Zander and Zander (2000) in *The Art of Possibility* all look at effective leadership as a holistic and principal centered. Covey stated, "building a character of total integrity isn't easy…but it's possible. It begins with the desire to center our lives on correct principles" (p. 318). Lambert (1998) also believed in personal growth as a way to capacity and leadership. Galford and Maruca (2006), looked at leadership success through leaving a legacy by making a lasting and significant difference in the organizations they lead. Sergiovanni (2007) looked at leadership as a moral craft and termed the phrase servant leadership. He stated, "Servant leadership is the means by which leaders get the necessary legitimacy to lead" (p. 51). Fullan (2005) looked at leadership through building capacity in others. Tolle (2004) theorized that true leadership came from an inward power and that a centered and successful life focused on the present. Zander and

Zander (2000) believed that leadership by considering that anything is possible depended on a leader's perspective and ability to think outside the box.

      Participatory action research (PAR). This term refers to the habit of surveying and testing a perspective before undertaking it Sergiovanni (2007), In *Rethinking Leadership*, Brown and Moffett (1999) suggest a more communal moral approach to leadership as opposed to a bureaucratic hierarchical model of corporate leadership. They also advocated for practitioner research, which cultivates the habit of surveying and testing a prospective before undertaking it. Before you proceed, step back and look at the big picture, lest you act rashly on raw impulse. Determine what happens first, consider what it leads to, and then act in accordance with what you have learned (Lebell, 1995).

      Change agents. Researchers have looked at effective leadership vision, mission, and strategy not as related to the organization but grounded in the individual leader and judging success by the impact leaders have on those that follow them and the ability to effectively manage change (Galford & Maruca, 2006; Heath & Heath, 2010). Bridges (2003) looks at how leaders (a) effectively manage change and the importance of dealing with the guilt, resentment, anxiety, self absorption, and (b) stress real and measurable costs of implementing change in an organization. Literature on leadership continues to be an ongoing topic. Effective leaders know their strengths, have emotional intelligence, know the culture of their school, understand officer politics, lead from a moral self awareness based on self determined goals and principles, use participant action research, and are change agents.

Summary

This chapter provided a literature review of existing historical, theoretical, and empirical background regarding facts that affect attrition and retention of students and families attending independent schools. Factors that affect retention addressed in this literature review included parent satisfaction, culture, board decisions (policy making and its effects), leadership, curriculum, and finance. These factors are broad and sometimes contradictory when looking at retention as a whole. In order to determine how these factors and other possible factors affect retention, an exploratory study on one case was optimal.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology used in this study. The chapter begins with an overview including the proposed research questions, followed by sections on description of the school, research design, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Overview and Research Questions

This study assumed an exploratory, descriptive approach, applying mixed-methods case study, namely KDS, a K-8 faith-based independent school in the southwest. This school strives for academic excellence through an interdisciplinary, integrated general studies and Judaic program with an emphasis on Jewish values. The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to analyze data that relates to retention and recruitment issues as a means to revitalize the school, increase enrollment, and reduce attrition. This researcher gathered evidence to answer the research questions from school archival documents, such as admissions records, field notes taken by the researcher, an online survey completed by parents and school stakeholders, plus interviews with stakeholders including parents, board members, and staff. By examining school records and other appropriate archival materials and conducting surveys and interviews, this researcher examined how factors and themes were reflected in the school's retention and recruitment policies and practices for elementary and middle school students in order to increase the ability of the school faculty and administrators to better meet the needs and expectations of parents.

The following research questions helped guide this study:

1. What is stakeholders' understanding of the student retention and recruitment at an independent faith-based day school?

2. What actions are stakeholders aware of that have been taken to improve student retention and recruitment at an independent faith-based day school?

3. What policy changes do stakeholders believe would make a positive impact on student retention and recruitment at an independent faith-based day school?

4. What level of importance do stakeholders place on various factors that affect student retention and recruitment policies?

Research questions 1 through 3 were primarily answered through semi-structured interviews, while research question 4 was primarily answered through an online survey.

Description of School Under Study

The researcher obtained approval from the head of school at KDS to do this study (see Appendix A). This kindergarten through eighth grade faith-based independent school has a coed student population of 156. It is a Pluralistic Jewish Day School and accredited by both NAIS and North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI). Ninety-five percent of the school population is Jewish, and 75% are unaffiliated with a specific synagogue. The parent body is diverse in ethnicity and income. Faculty includes 14 females and 5 males, with an average of 5 years teaching at this school. Administration includes three males and three females with an average tenure of less than 5 years. The board of trustees has 17 members. Three board members are parents. The remainder includes business and community leaders, and one board member is non religious. The board president serves for 2 years; other

board members can serve indefinitely. The current board president has been in office for 2 years.

Research Design and Rationale

A mixed-methods case study was chosen to answer the research questions of how and why retention and recruitment are declining at a faith-based independent day school and efforts made to prevent or reverse this decline. Since the phenomenon is a recent, real life issue and information was collected over a 6-year period, a case study was chosen as a suitable method of study (Yin, 2013). In order to answer the questions of how and why, this study looked at one school, KDS. The data to be collected and conclusions to be drawn from the research questions may provide a conceptual framework and an action plan for getting from the questions to a set of conclusions.

This study applied mixed-methods and included an online survey for parents and school stakeholders (see Appendix B), archival documents, school records, and personal interviews with parents and stakeholders (see Appendix C), as well as field notes by the researcher. The methods provided both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

Procedures

Field notes and Archival records were collected by the researcher from the campus of KDS and online. Notes were collected by the researcher and provided in Appendix D. Field notes and archival records included observations, reports from the board of trustees and staff, yearly enrollment figures, board and staff handbooks, as well as national retention and recruitment figures from the Jewish Community Day School

Network (RAVSAK). Collection of documents was done by the researcher. Consent for using archival records was obtained through the head of school (see Appendix A).

Development of survey form and validity. The researcher along with his dissertation chair developed 10 questions based upon the literature in Chapter 2. A panel of experts including two heads of school, a board member, and the admissions director reviewed the questions for completeness. Questions were revised based upon their consensus of opinion. A pilot test was used to determine respondents' understanding of the questions and occurred after the panel of experts reviewed the survey. This pilot test followed a moderately structured group format and included a discussion on survey questions but allowed for deviations when appropriate. These participants were selected to represent the nature of the actual respondents to the actual online survey, namely five parents and five other stakeholders. Following a discussion on each survey question, group members were asked to write down revisions to the questions. The opportunity to write comments encouraged less vocal participants to share their opinions. It also served as a reflective activity to encourage further input from participants.

The pilot group met for 1 hour in a comfortable room on the King David campus. The group was led by a moderator, a doctoral student. The moderator took notes. Notes were saved in a password protected file on the researcher's computer. Based upon the respondents' suggestions, the questions were slightly revised to be easily understood by the study's participants.

Survey and interview participants. The first group received the online survey and included stakeholders of the school: board members, faculty, administrators, counselors, donors, and all persons registered for community email at the school from

September 2005 through June 2012. The second group interviewed by the researcher and

included stakeholders selected by the head of school and included board members,

faculty, administrators, and parents.

        Procedures for collecting surveys. Approval for participants and

instrumentation procedures was obtained from Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board

(IRB) and KDS by the head master (see Appendix A). The "Parent and Stakeholders

Survey" was placed on survey monkey and was anonymous (see Appendix B).

Respondents read and agreed to a letter of consent (see Appendix E) before responding to

the survey.

        After IRB approval and during the Spring of 2012, KDS emailed the online

survey to all stakeholders (see Appendix B & E). All available stakeholders identified

from September 2005 through June 2012 received a survey. All stakeholders with

current email addresses received a survey. This survey was designed to capture parents'

and stakeholders thoughts regarding retention and recruitment factors at KDS. Thus, this

study used a convenience sample to ascertain parents' and stakeholders responses to the

research questions.

        A mixed methods case study was chosen to answer the research questions of how

and why retention and recruitment are declining at an independent school and efforts

made to prevent or reverse this decline. Since the phenomenon is a recent real life issue

and information was collected over a 5-year period, a case study is a suitable method of

study (Yin, 2013). In order to answer the questions of how and why, this study looked at

one school, KDS. The data to be collected and conclusions to be drawn from the research

questions may provide a conceptual framework and an action plan for getting from the questions to a set of conclusions.

A total of 530 surveys comprised the primary data for this study. The head of school agreed to provide the researcher full access to all data collected. The surveys were collected by an administrative assistant at KDS as part of normal yearly self evaluation by the school. A total of 530 surveys were sent to stakeholders using Survey Monkey. A link to the survey was also made available as a link on the school's website. Of the 123 returned surveys, 72 were from current parents, 16 from former parents, 5 from board members, 22 from faculty, and 11 other (1 parent miss-identified, 1 alumnae, 1 unidentified, and 8 non-respondents). KDS retained the surveys. The data was stored at school's main office. The researcher had limited access, namely to analyze this data for the study.

Procedures for interviews. Once the quantitative data collection was complete, a series of personal interviews occurred. The head of school selected himself as KDS head of school, the assistant head of school, 5 board members (who may also be current parents), director of admissions, one office staff and 6 classroom teachers. Parents and faculty were an intentionmal sample to represent the various types of stakeholders. The researcher contacted 20 parents by email and 6 parents expressed interest. The researcher interviewed these parents, four by phone and two in person. The interview served as an opportunity to discuss with stakeholders their perceptions of retention and recruitment in a more detailed way and allowed the researcher to confirm the findings from the survey. These interviews took place in a convenient place for the interviewees.

The administrative assistant collaborated with intended interviewees for a suitable time and location. Interviews were scheduled for 20 minutes but ranged in time from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. If interviews could not occur in-person after several attempts, interviews were conducted over the phone. In-person interviews took place at KDS in a comfortable location within the school. There were no incentives for participation, and interviews were done in the natural course of school business during normal school activity.

The researcher conducted the interviews and accommodated the interviewees' requests for a convenient time and place for each interview. Each interview occured at a time and in a location in which there were no other distractions. The researcher electronically sent a copy of the informed consent letters (see Appendix F and Appendix G) before the interview so that the person could choose to participate or not participate beforehand. The researcher brought a hard copy of the Letter of Consent to each interview. Refer to Appendix F for Letter of Consent and Appendix C for interview protocol and questions.

The interviews followed a moderately structured format and began with a discussion on the results of the survey as a way to connect the interviewees' thinking on the topic of retention and recruitment. The interview consisted of three questions, mirroring the research questions, that were designed to elicit participant input on effective strategies to improve retention and recruitment (see Appendix C).

The researcher tape recorded respondent answers using a digital recorder. Permission was secured from the respondents prior to the interview as part of the protocol (see Appendix E). The qualitative data collected in these interviews, such audio tapes

and interviews transcripts, is the researcher's responsibility for tasks related to the protection of human subjects. For the qualitative data, the researcher knew the names of the interviewees and removed their names during the transcription process and assigned them a code number. At the conclusion of the study, data collected was electronically stored on a password protected computer or in a locked file cabinet in the primary researchers' home office closet. Only the investigator has the password to the computer and the key to the locked file. The data and any supporting documents will be shredded and electronically deleted within 5 years after the completion of the study.

Protection of Human Subjects

As noted under procedures, this study has safeguards in place to ensure that human subjects' rights and privacy are protected. Participants were selected on a volunteer basis and included school staff, parents, trustees, and other stakeholders. Participants decided whether to participate and could select a convenient time to conduct the interview. Parents, school personnel, and community members were the primary data sources for this study; therefore, the researcher's intention is to act in accordance with ethical principles for human subjects protection. Since data gathering poses minimal risk of physical and emotional harm to parents, students, and school personnel, the researcher subbmitted an exempt review application to the IRB and stated on the application the rationale for exempt review status. The researcher informed all participants (individuals and groups) of their right not to participate if they chose to, and reminded them that their participation was on a voluntary basis. Participants were informed that data and information collected would remain confidential; individual names did not appear in the study. The researcher also assured participants that there would be no physical or

emotional risk involved in participation. Information and data collected would be used as primary source of data for the benefit of the students, parents, and KDS.

Institutional approvals were sought from Pepperdine University's IRB. Approval from KDS was also sought from the head of school, and written permission was provided. Participation in this study was voluntary. Informed consent was required from participants. During the consent process, participants were given instruction on the nature of the study. Participants were not be asked to provide their names for the online survey. In each survey, student or family names were not referenced in results. Data collected from school records was categorized by characteristics and not by family name. The participants were informed of the data collection process and that the information collected was not categorized by family name.

There was a low risk of loss of privacy for participants in this study. Permission was secured from the respondents prior to the interview through a consent form (see Appendix E). KDS stored parent and stakeholders' surveys on a password protected file. All hard copy materials were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. All electronically stored data was kept on a password protected computer. Records will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed. The electronic files will be purged and hard copy materials will be shredded. The survey was sent as part of regular day-to-day business. The school provided the researcher with survey results without participant identification. The researcher did not have access to family names. The interviews were conducted by a trained interviewer who is a doctoral dissertation student. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by an outside transcription agency. Head of school provided letter of assent (see Appendix A).

Summary

The research and methodology used in this mixed-methods case study included both qualitative and quantitative data. KDS has already given the written survey to participants. Interviews and the pilot test were also conducted to triangulate data and improve validity. The following chapter will describe analyses of the different data sets and the results. Chapter 4 will present an analysis of the data obtained from an online survey, archival data, field notes, and personal interviews. The findings are also presented by research questions. Data presented in Chapter 4 will provide the basis for conclusions and recommendations for improvement of retention and recruitment in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data and Findings

This chapter presents an analysis of data and results obtained from: (a) a comprehensive online survey to determine perceptions regarding factors important to retention and recruitment, (b) an analysis of data from archival documents and school records, (c) an analysis of personal interviews with parents and other stakeholders, and (d) review of field notes taken by the researcher. The information in this mixed-methods case study contains data analyzed from students and their families from the past 5 years. It also included the perceptions of current parents and stakeholders. The methods provided both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This mix of designs allows triangulation of data, which helped to ensure non-bias in sources, investigators, and methods (Wilson, 2009). This chapter ends with a summary of findings under major themes.

Analyses of Survey Data

Survey Monkey provided descriptive findings for each of the items on the survey. The survey was divided into three sections. Section I used descriptive information to provide a summary of participant demographics. These questions provide a profile of participants. Section 2 of the survey contains a Likert type rating scale which asked participants to rate factors relating to enrollment and attrition as not important, somewhat important, important, or extremely important. Section 3 of the survey contained open-ended questions designed to discover factors that might be unique to KDS and not previously identified.

Of the returned surveys (123 out of a possible 530), 88 were from parents (72 current parents and 16 from former parents), 5 from board members, 22 from faculty, and

11 other (1 parent miss-identified, 1 alumna, 1 unidentified, and 8 non-respondents). Of the returned surveys, parents represented the largest proportion of respondents by group, specifically, 71.5%. Faculty responded at 47.8%, board members responded at 27%. All other community respondents of the remaining respondents came from the community at large and represented .025% of respondents. Therefore the findings are presented by the three high-responding groups, namely parents, faculty, and board members. A description of the respondents by group is portrayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Description of Respondents by Group

Groups	N of Respondents	N of Total Group (Potential Respondents)	% of Responses From Total Group
Parents	88	123	71.5
Faculty	22	46	47.8
Board	5	18	27
Community	11	343	0.02

Figure 2 shows the range of responses of current and former parents, board members, faculty, and other consecutive year's attendance at KDS. Six respondents listed 1 year, 9 respondents listed 2 years, 11 respondents listed 3 years, 13 respondents listed 4 years, 10 respondents listed 5 years, 7 respondents listed 6 years, 8 respondents listed 7 years, 8 respondents listed 8 years, and 7 respondents listed 9 years attending KDS. Twenty respondents indicated not applicable (NA) because they did not have children at the school at this time. The lowest number of respondents was 1 year (6.1%),

and 6 to 9 years (7.1%). This data indicates that the respondents have children in

different grades and represent a cross section of the school.
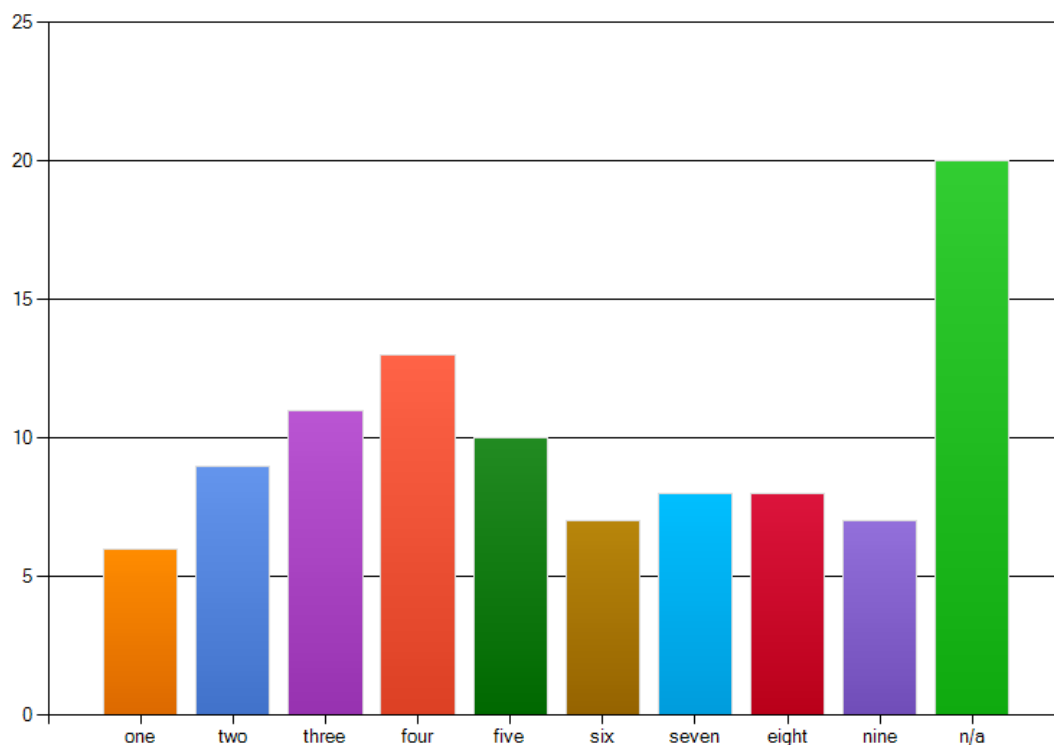
Figure 2. Percent of respondents by grade level of student.
Note. *NA* means that the respondents did not have a child at the school.

Figure 3 shows the range of responses of current and former parents, board

members, faculty, and others regarding their perceptions of the school being selective or

non-selective in its admissions process. Teachers rated the school equally as selective

and non-selective. A higher percentage of parents perceive the school to be non-selective

(50%). Board members rated the school as selective (60%). Faculty rated the school

equally selective and non-selective.
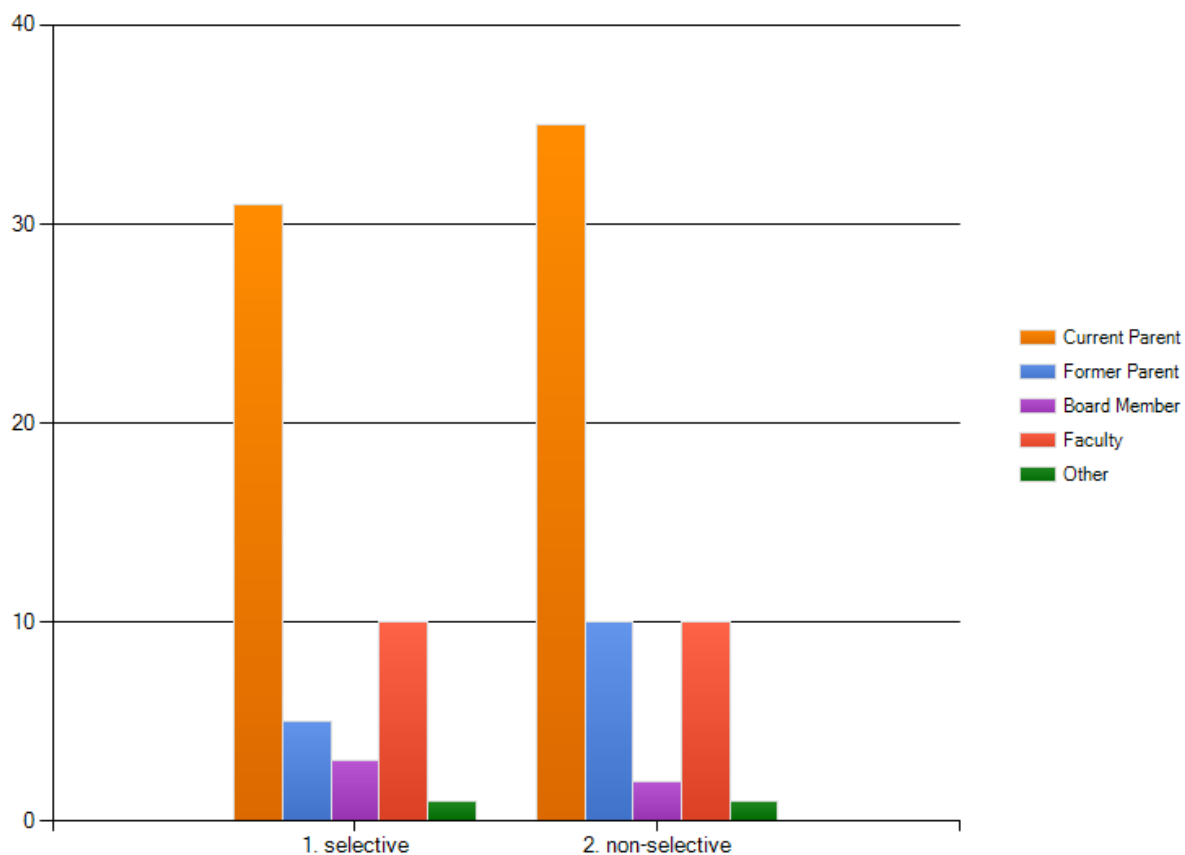
Figure 3. Number of respondents who view the school as selective or nonselective by group.

Figure 4 presents three factors: board/mission, head/principal, and teacher/staff relationships as factors important to recruitment and attrition. Participants could respond by marking one of four categories: not important, somewhat important, important, and extremely important. Evidence in Figure 3 indicates that approximately 40% of participants rated board/mission as important while head/principal was rated by 60% of participants as extremely important and teacher/staff relationships rated, by approximately 75% participants, as extremely important.
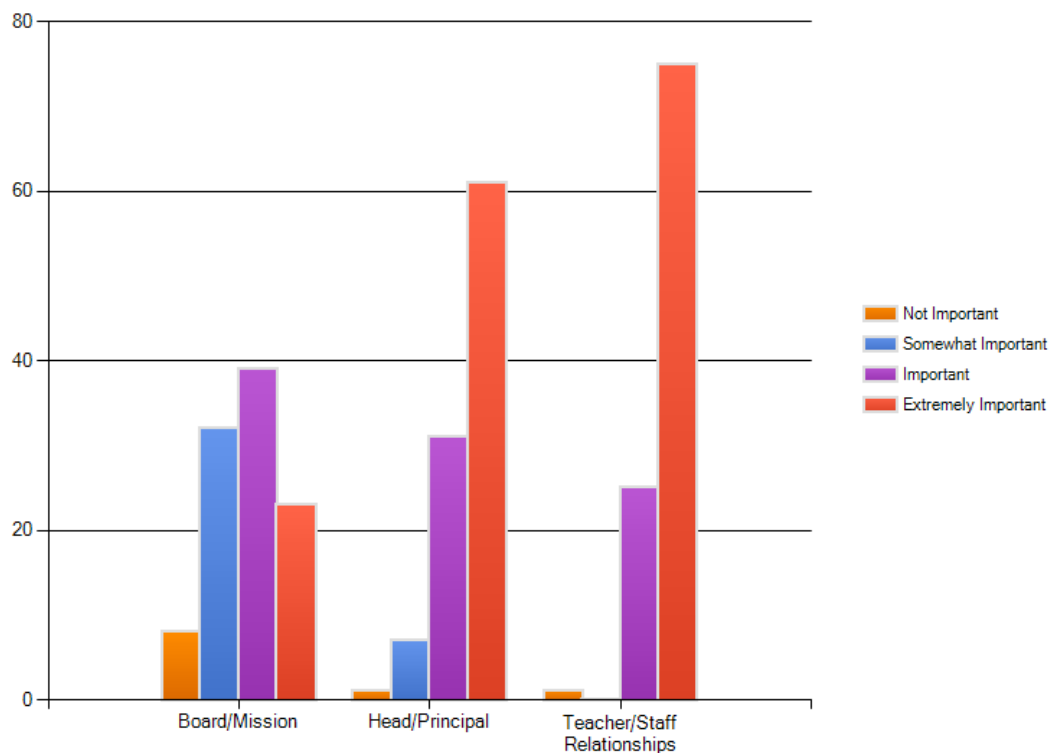
Figure 4. Number of respondents by group rating the importance of board/mission, head/principal, and teacher/staff relationships as a factor in retention and recruitment.

Figure 4 shows that all groups found teacher/staff relationships to be extremely important. This data is not surprising since most of the respondents were parents and teachers. All groups also believe that the head/principal rated as extremely important but not as important as teacher/staff relationships. The board/mission were rated as important but less so than head/principal and teacher staff relationships.

Regarding school culture, seven factors were considered: social connections/friends, meeting individual needs, extracurricular activities, after school programs, Shabbat lunch, and assemblies. Social connections were rated extremely important by current and former parents, faculty, and board members. Meeting individual needs was rated by parents and board members as extremely important.

Faculty rated this factor as important. Extracurricular activities were rated as important by former parents, board members, and faculty. Current parents rated this factor as somewhat important. Shabbat lunch was rated as important by current parents, faculty, and board members. Parents of former students rated this factor as unimportant. Assemblies were rated as important by all constituencies. Holiday observance was rated as important to parents, board members, and faculty. Table 2 shows these ratings.

Table 2

Percentages of Respondent Ratings of School Culture

School Culture	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Extremely Important	Response Count
Meeting individual needs	1%	1%	27.5%	**70.6%**	102
Social connections and friends	1%	1%	43.1%	**51%**	102
Extracurricular Activities	6.9%	39.2%	**44.1%**	9.8%	102
Assemblies	13.7%	38.2%	**40.2%**	7.8%	102
Shabbat lunch	16.7%	27.5%	**37.3%**	18.6%	102
Holiday observance	8.9%	24.8%	**36.6%**	29.7%	101
After school activities	19.6%	**43.1%**	29.4%	7.8%	102

Note. Bolded percentages indicate the highest percentage for that curriculum category.

Table 2 shows that meeting individual needs of students at 70.6% of stakeholders is the highest, rating this factor as extremely important. Social connections and friends were also rated as extremely important at 51%. Stakeholders rated extracurricular

activities (41.1%), assemblies (40.2%), Shabbat lunch (37.3%), and holiday observance

(36.%) as important, and after-school programs (43.1%) as somewhat important.

Table 3

Percentages of Respondent Ratings of Curriculum by Group

Topic	Importance	Current Parent	Former Parent	Board Member	Faculty	Other
Secular	Extremely important	80.0%	76.9%	60.0%	64.7%	100.0%
	Important	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Judaics	Extremely important	50%	46.2%	0%	47.1%	71.4%
	Important	0%	0%	60%	0%	0%
Flexibility in instructional needs of students	Extremely important	57.6%	53.8%	0%	0%	85.7%
	Important	0%	0%	60%	47.1%	0%
Technology	Extremely important	0%	0%	0%	52.9%	42.9%
	Important	57.6%	61.5%	80%	0%	42.9%
Support/enrich-ment programs	Extremely important	0%	0%	0%	0%	57.1%
	Important	51.6%	46.2%	60%	41.2%	0%

Table 3 shows that all groups rated the secular academic program as extremely

important. All groups except the board rated the Judaic program as extremely important.

Flexibility in instructional needs of students was rated as extremely important by parents.

Board members and faculty members rated this factor as important.

Table 4 shows technology rated as important by current and former parents and

board members, and was rated as extremely important by faculty. Support and

enrichment programs were rated as important by all groups.

Table 4

Percentages of Respondent Ratings of Curriculum by Importance

Curriculum	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Extremely Important	Response Count
Secular	1%	2%	19.8%	**77.2%**	101
Flexibility in instructional needs of students	1%	5.9%	39.2%	**53.9%**	102
Judaics	3.9%	8.8%	38.2%	**49%**	102
Technology	4.9%	12.7%	**53.9%**	28.4%	102
Support/enrichment programs	1%	12%	**50%**	37%	100

Note. Bolded percentages indicate the highest percentage for that curriculum category.

Regarding curriculum, five factors were considered: secular, Judaics, support/enrichment programs, flexibility in instructional needs of students, and technology. Academic curriculum was rated extremely important and important by 77.2% of respondents. Flexibility in instructional needs of students was the second highest rated factor at 53.9%. Judaic curriculum was rated as extremely important and important by 49% of respondents, making this factor the third highest. Technology was rated as important by 53.9% of respondents. Support programs were rated as important by 50% of respondents, making it the fourth highest factor. Table 4 shows stakeholders rated secular, Judaic, and flexibility in meeting individual needs of students as extremely important and technology and support programs as important.

Regarding financial factors two categories were considered: value and financial aid. Value was rated by both current parents and board members as extremely important.

Former parents, faculty, and others rated this factor as important. All stakeholders rated financial aid as extremely important, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5

Percentages of Respondent Ratings of Value and Finacial Aid by Group

Expense-Related Concern	Importance	Current Parent	Former Parent	Board Member	Faculty
Value	Extremely important	54.7%	0%	60%	0%
	Important	0%	54.7%	0%	56.3%
Financial Aid	Extremely important	69.2%	50%	80%	50%
	Important	0%	0%	0%	0%

Regarding parent satisfaction, three factors were considered: parent input, clear communication, and safety. Safety and clear communication were rated as extremely important by all stakeholders. Parent input was rated as important by current and former parents, board members and faculty, as presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Percentages of Respondent Ratings of Parent Satisfaction Issues by Group

Parent Satisfaction Issues	Importance	Current Parent	Former Parent	Board Member	Faculty
Safety	Extremely important	78.8%	61.5%	60.0%	56.3%
	Important	0%	0%	0%	0%
Clear communication	Extremely important	72.7%	53.8%	60%	47.1%
	Important	0%	0%	0%	0%
Parent input	Extremely important	0%	0%	0%	35.3%
	Important	51.5%	53.8%	80%	0%

In response to the question, "What other factors (if any) do you think are important in determining a decision to re-enroll at KDS?," 53 respondents replied. Responses were generally positive regarding the current educational environment. Sixteen of the responses described the positive quality of the teachers and student relationships. Respondent 100 stated, "The quality of the teachers is extremely important." Respondent 123, stated, "Quality of education, values, strength of teachers."

Open-ended questions were designed to discover factors which might be unique to KDS and not previously identified. Question 6 asked, "What other factors (if any) do you think are important in determining a decision to enroll?" Fifty-four respondents answered the question and 69 respondents skipped this question. Examples from these responses were provided to further illustrate additional factors. Eleven respondents made comments supporting the strong academic curriculum. Eleven noted individualized instruction and small classes. "Quality of progress of student achievement of academic skills and executive functioning and study skills" was stated by Respondent 70.

Eight responded positively about the religious reputation of the school. Respondent 23 stated, "Opportunity to grow in Judaism;" Respondent 73, "A strong Judaic curriculum and the sense of community," and seven made comments on the communication between students, parents, and other staff. Respondent 108 stated, "Feeling like there is an open door when there are concerns." Respondent 104 stated, "Communication with parents via email to keep us involved and aware of our children's needs."

There were negative comments too. Some parents were adamant that bullying was an unresolved issue. Six parents expressed concern regarding how the faculty

handles bullying. Respondent 112 stated, "the way in which the administration is handling the bullying issues in middle school, they are not being dealt with effectively," but one parent, Respondent 27, commented that issues regarding bullying were "for the most part" handled as they came up. Two parents emphasized the need to improve parent school communication. Respondent 123 stated, "Small classes, excellent teachers, hot lunches, excellent communication."

Another question was, "As a parent, how has your perception of KDS changed (if at all) from when you determined to enroll your child to now that you have been enrolled? If you are not a parent of a KDS student, how has your perception of KDS changed (if at all) during the time of your association with the school?" Twenty-eight of the respondents provided expansive positive comments about KDS. Respondent 104 stated, "My daughter went from 5th to 10th grade level in reading and math, while only enrolled 1.5 years. She further has changed her entire outlook, is more goal oriented, more thoughtful, and more community minded. The other families at KDS have been wonderful in welcoming her as one of the only children not to have spent a lifetime there, and supported her self image and confidence, not to mention her trip to Israel. 'Wow,' is all I can say. Thank you KDS!" Respondent 94 stated, "Our expectations were greatly exceeded." Another stated the following:

> My perception of the school before we started was that it was highly academically rigorous, which I was nervous about. What I realized once we started was that, yes, academics are important but appropriate to the age level and with so much cross curriculum development! I also see so much value in the amount of public speaking/performing opportunities that the children have. In first grade, I was

overwhelmed with the amount of stage performances but I realized quickly how much self esteem and confidence my child gained from this. I also had the perception that the school is a wonderful community of people and that perception has been exceeded! (Respondent 60)

Twenty-nine respondents expressed negative concerns that arose during their children's enrollment while at KDS. Eight respondents expressed concerns regarding academic staff including too frequent teacher turnover, academic rigor, and others expressed specialized requests regarding the curriculum. "We thought there would be more individual tailoring of education for children's specific needs and strengths. There was a lot of talk about this at one point, but it really didn't happen" (Respondent 79). Seven respondents expressed student behavior at the school as a negative factor regarding retention. "My opinion of KDS has steadily declined over the 6 years we have been here. The fact that bullying has been allowed to run rampant with no consequence has left me considering leaving KDS" (Respondent 60).

Four respondents expressed concern over board governance behavior and political strife. "Too many major decisions being made by too few board members that are completely out of touch with reality," stated Respondent 116. Three respondents were concerned about the transition from lower to middle school, such as this comment: "Sense of community in middle school has dwindled. Overall feeling of spirit and pride not what it used to be" (Respondent 114). However one respondent stated, "My perception has changed for the better as I have gotten to know more about KDS and gotten more involved."

Analyses of Archival Data: The Founding and Early Years of the School

The following is a summary of the researcher's review of archival data. Archival data included the board manual, board notes, faculty/staff handbook, parent handbook, school records, and field notes. The researcher had informal conversations on the campus with board members, staff, faculty, and parents. The researcher synthesized this information into a narrative description as follows. KDS began with the idea of creating an independent religious full day school in 1971. Planning started after a particular Yom Kippur of that year when the Rabbi called for the formation of a religious day school. Two families immediately stepped forward, and they, along with their Rabbi, took the first steps to establish this faith-based independent Jewish day school. A board of directors was chosen and planning for the day school went forward. Additional families became involved and community support increased. Day school models and styles from across the country were examined, and those involved made visits to the schools that had implemented these models. A plan of action was established to begin the school. The school began by renting space at a local synagogue, and classes started in the fall of 1973 with 42 students. The administration consisted of one director and one school secretary. The board of directors established teacher salaries, sick leave, vacation, and all other issues related to finance. Accounts payable, including bills and payroll, were managed by a volunteer bookkeeper or board member.

Although financial struggles were a constant concern during the early years of this school, the school continued to grow at a modest pace. In 1976, the first graduation occurred. The board also created its first strategic plan. By the fall of 1977, enrollment had increased to over 125 students. However, the school continued to experience

budgetary problems and frequent administrative turnover. In 1988, Operation Exodus changed the shape of this community and the school. As the Soviet Union opened up, many new Russian immigrants were migrating to the United States and settling in the area. Because of the influx of immigrants, there was an immediate need to address the educational needs of the new population as well as the infusion of a new large group of families with a desire to have their children enroll in a faith-based independent Jewish day school. This school responded by providing 1-year full tuition scholarships to all immigrants. This increased enrollment went from 130 to 170 students. Trailers were brought in to accommodate the growing numbers, but the need for this school to have its own campus became apparent. At this time KDS began its association with the Jewish Federation and the board of trustees revisited its strategic plan and included the development of a new campus. In January of 1994, the groundbreaking ceremony began construction on a new campus. A $3,000,000 campus was made possible the support of the local religious community. In 1997 a middle school program was added.

During the 2005-2006 school years legislation was passed that allowed a dollar for dollar tax reimbursement to parents who donated funds to private school. The board of directors established a scholarship program to take advantage of this new legislation. The legislation allowed the school to consistently award over $275,000 in financial aid every year, and made independent school education more affordable for middle-income families.

The school has received North Central Accreditation (NCA) for excellence in education, as well as accreditation from RAVSAK (Jewish Community Day School Network). The school was also voted the top elementary school in science at Southern

Regional Science & Engineering Fair (SARSEF) in 2004 and 2010. In 2005, the board

completed and adopted its third institutional assessment and strategic plan. The stated

goal was to improve the school and bring its policy and curriculum in line with the best

independent schools in the country.

In 2008, the board hired a new head master who oversaw the reorganization of the

school curriculum in kindergarten through eighth grade. During this time, the school also

changed its hiring policy and implemented a policy of national searches for faculty

positions. The school was reorganized during this period, creating two separate

divisions. Fifth grade was moved to the middle school division, and a lower school

division of kindergarten through fourth grade was created.

Analysis of School Records

The researcher collected enrollment data between the years of 2008 to 2012. The

researcher created tables based on the information provided in school records. Table 7

shows the number of inquiries regarding admission at KDS in a given year by grade

level. The highest number of inquiries was made at the kindergarten level followed

closely by first grade. Inquires decrease from second through eighth grade.

Table 7

Inquires About Potential Enrollment

School Year	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	Total
2008-2009	25	16	5	3	2	6	9	1	3	70
2009-2010	30	14	4	3	7	1	6	2	0	67
2010-2011	38	19	10	5	13	4	9	4	7	109
2011-2012	29	16	1	3	1	1	2	2	0	55
2012-2013	29	29	6	4	3	5	2	2	1	81

Table 8 shows the number of tours potential students took at KDS in a given year by grade level. Kindergarten followed by first grade represented a majority of tours given to applicants. Data also shows that tours also decrease significantly after first grade. During the 2008-2009 school year, 91% of students who toured the school applied for admission. In 2009-2010, 76% of students who toured applied for admission. In 2010-2011, 96% of students who toured the campus applied for admission. In 2011-2012, 53% of students who toured applied for admission. In 2012-2013, 96% of students who toured the campus applied for admission. Out of the previous 5 years, 3 have had 90% or better rate of student tours ending in student applications to KDS. During the school years that tours and applications were 90% and above, retention also improved by 50% over the years where tours and applications were lower.

Table 8

Tours of School That Resulted in Enrollment

School Year	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	Total
2008-2009	20	11	1	2	1	2	7	0	1	45
2009-2010	14	7	2	2	4	1	5	0	0	35
2010-2011	19	10	6	4	6	3	6	2	5	61
2011-2012	21	15	4	2	0	2	2	1	0	47
2012-2013	19	20	3	4	2	2	1	2	0	53

Table 9 shows the number of applications for enrollment at KDS in a given year by grade level. Kindergarten followed by first grade represented the highest amount of applications. The data also shows that applications decreased by students from second thorough eighth grade.

Table 9

Applications for Enrollment

School Year	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	Total
2008-2009	18	9	1	1	1	2	4	0	1	37
2009-2010	22	13	2	1	3	0	3	1	0	45
2010-2011	21	11	5	4	6	3	5	2	5	62
2011-2012	15	7	2	0	1	0	2	1	0	28
2012-2013	16	16	3	4	2	3	1	2	9	47

Table 10 shows the number of enrolled students by grade level. In four of the five

years reported, class totals increase through fourth grade and then drop in fifth and sixth

grade. Class enrollment in third and fourth grades are typically the largest and decrease

in fifth and sixth grade.

Table 10

Class Totals for Enrollment

School Year	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	Total
2008-2009	11	19	29	26	20	12	19	14	14	164
2009-2010	15	18	16	19	27	13	14	16	13	151
2010-2011	13	20	23	17	23	25	14	14	18	167
2011-2012	9	18	20	21	16	21	22	13	15	155
2012-2013	14	22	NA	NA	24	11	NA	NA	9	151

Data from the previous tables indicate that students and families who inquire and

tour the school typically enroll. Also, inquiries and tours drop significantly after first

grade. Data from the previous tables indicate that there is little recruitment for new

students after first grade.

Table 11

Loss of Students During Highest Attrition Grades

Academic Year	Class Size	Students Lost Between Grade 4 and 5	Class Size	Students Lost Between Grade 5 and 6
2012-2013	24	NA	11	NA
2011-2012	23	14	26	4
2010-2011	27	3	13	1
2009-2010	20	7	12	1

Students typically make the decision to transfer from KDS to another school between fourth and fifth grades or between fifth and sixth grades. Table 11 shows the attrition rates in these grades. For overall attrition in all grades, during the 2008-2009 school year, six students left KDS. In the 2009-2010 school year, eight students did not re-enroll. In the 2010-2011 school year, five students did not re-enroll. During the 2011-2012 school year, KDS had the greatest rate of attrition with 18 students electing not to return. The 2012-2013 numbers are not available at this time.

Analysis of Interview Data

Interviews were transcribed and notes were added by the interviewer. The transcribed interviews were analyzed by trained coders. The trained coders included a Pepperdine doctoral student and faculty member. The two coders followed the steps of Powell and Renner (2003). The coders then met with the researcher to discuss themes that were derived from their coding process. Throughout this data analysis, the researcher's intention was to employ Powell and Renner's five-step model:

1. Get to know your data: The coders read all 22 interviews.

2. Focus the analysis: The coders went back and used highlighters to note repetitive ideas.

3. Categorize information: The highlighted data was given names or themes.

4. Identify patterns and connections within and between categories: The themes were put on a spreadsheet and quotes supporting the themes were identified.

5. Interpretation: Bringing it all together. The researcher developed conclusions and recommendations based on the data.

The coders categorized the data into five main themes: communication, religiousness academic offerings, finance, marketing suggestions.

Communication. Ninety percent of the interview respondents mentioned communication issues. Four respondents felt KDS communicated effectively with families. Respondents listed a sense of open communication within the community and the frequency of communication between school and parents as examples of how KDS uses communication effectively. Participant 120 stated, "KDS strengths include the academic atmosphere, small classes, and individual attention." However, 25 respondents comments were regarded areas needing improvement. Two issues that were listed by respondents were a lack of regularly scheduled email blasts and not repeating email blasts for events that would occur in the distant future. Parents are not happy with the website. Since all school communication now comes through the website email, if the email is missed or lost, parents are left without important information. The intermittent sending of email messages to families means that families will likely miss important information. "The change that KDS made with the weekly update helps to address this issue and could probably be expanded to include other important information" (Participant 1101). Parents noted that they appreciated consistent weekly newsletters and suggested that the teacher newsletters should be signed by parents and returned to school.

When stakeholders bring issues to the attention of administration they want timely feedback that the issue was attended to. Participant 1103 stated, "The area that needs the most work is communication. I had to ask administration three times to follow up with a family that had expressed interest in KDS. I still don't know what happened with this family. I think follow up is also a weak area at the school." Respondents listed the need for improved communication, noting that communication and follow through with parents and faculty is an important factor. Respondents also expressed a desire face to face communication, with statements such as "KDS needs to be extremely receptive to parents with verbal communication not just emails" (Respondent 26). Respondents expressed concern regarding the responsiveness to parents, "I am continually amazed at the poor communication. From the website (never updated, essential contact info is missing from the home page, slow or non-approval from admin of items to be posted) to the lack of communication from administration regarding ongoing classroom issues" (Respondent 8). Respondents point out lack of communication from administration specifically as a concern, "Over the past 4 years, communication from.

Religiousness versus academic focus. Of survey respondents, 81% commented on the religious aspects of the school and the culture of the school. Faith-based values pervade the culture and activities of the school. However, when stakeholders were asked if they knew the school mission only administration could recite it or find it on the school web page. Respondent 1114 stated, "We should be solid in who we are, we attract religious families, and offer opportunities for unaffiliated families to reconnect with their families." Participant 1124 stated, "We have seen a lot of changes since our oldest child (a graduate) enrolled in 2002, but the sense of community, the individual attention of

caring teachers and staff, and the integration of faith-based learning/identity/values remains strong. For our family, the Judaics curriculum—faith-based identity, values, tradition and practice, emphasis on Israel and Hebrew language—still takes priority in our decision to re-enroll" (Respondent 24).

A concern was raised by eight respondents regarding the religiousness of the school. Four respondents felt it was too religious, exemplified by the statement, "I think we need to consider what it is like to be a nonreligious student at a faith-based school. Catholic schools are able to successfully recruit non-Catholics because families recognize that Catholic schools offer a better education than they would get from the local school. We should recruit non-Jews!" (Respondent 121) Participant 1114 stated, "Regarding policy, I feel KDS should expand its applicant pool to include non-Jewish students." Respondents listed the missed days of school for Jewish holidays as a specific concern, stating, "We are increasingly unhappy with the amount of time missed due to holidays. While some are understandable, some are not. For instance, why do we have a half-day for Israel's birthday. This is unnecessary. Our children already go to school far less than they should. Please consider decreasing the number of days off and increasing the number of school days. This is a serious concern for us and may eventually push us to leave for a different school" (Respondent 51).

Other respondents felt that the school should be more religious. Participant 1188 stated, "The religious curriculum is not as strong as I would like." Participant 1163 stated, "I expected the skill level of some of the Judaic teachers to be higher, a stronger faith-based identity for the school with strong faith-based leadership, and to enroll faith-based kids exclusively."

Parents commented that they would prefer to have options regarding classes like Teflia, Hebrew Language instruction. Participant 1106 stated, "We have an orthodox track; there should also be a secular track." Stake holders support the religiousness of the school, stating, "When I enrolled my eldest child at KDS, I was impressed by the family feel, the academic rigor, the quality of the teachers, the faith-based values that were instilled in the students and the reputation I had heard about from other families" (Participant 1111).

Respondents expressed a desire for balance between the faith-based and academic curriculum, stating that "a factor for us is the quality of faculty and orientation of curriculum (the more integrated the better)" (Respondent 37). "My perception of the school before we started was that it was highly academically rigorous, which I was nervous about. What I realized once we started was that, yes, academics are important but appropriate to the age level and with so much cross curriculum development!" (Respondent 60).

Respondents also commented on the lack of individualization for students and the quality of the teachers, "We thought there would be more individual tailoring of education for children's specific needs and strengths. There was a lot of talk about this at one point, but it really didn't happen. It was also much more secular than we first thought, which was just fine with us" (Respondent 83). "Most expectations have been met or exceeded. More direct supervision of teaching staff needs to occur helping them with their curricular choices and overall classroom management skills. KDS still has a bunch of extremely second rate teachers. Most seem to be leaving at the end of this year

but more emphasis on younger more motivated and innovative teaching methods"
(Respondent 37).

However, others expressed an interest in a more academic focus, "the secular
education is the most important thing to me. If there were problems in any other area, I
could work with the school. If the secular education declined, I would not re-enroll my
children" (Respondent 65). Other respondents expressed satisfaction with the
curriculum, but the deciding factor regarding re-enrollment was the focus on Jewish
values and culture, "We are at KDS because it provides the most comprehensive Jewish
education in [city]" (Respondent 24). "What is important to our family is the overall
effectiveness of the Jewish environment" (Respondent 62). "We want our children to
have the opportunity to grow in Judaism" (Respondent 23).

Academic offerings. Only 45% of respondents commented on academic issues
as related to retention and recruitment. Positive comments included high standards, faith-
based education with rigor, and differentiated instruction. The best education for each
individual, "My perception of KDS is that it lives up to its promises and in my experience
has exceeded my expectations" (Participant 1004).

Although parents seem happy with the overall curriculum, negative comments
reflected the idea of more individualization within the curriculum, as voiced by
Participant 1108. Another asked for "better opportunities for accelerated learners. When
we were scouting schools we were told that students could take high school level classes
or even go to local high schools for advanced classes, but I don't know of anyone who
had ever done that" (Participant 1117). One parent requested band. "KDS needs more

afterschool and enrichment activities like sports and band" (Participant 1105). One parent suggested building a gym.

Finance. Of the stakeholders, 27% mentioned finance as a factor in retention and recruitment. Comments from stakeholders were descriptive and did not mention finance as a serious concern. For example, appreciation for development office and others for bringing in donations to bring down the cost of tuition was mentioned as the school's budget is based primarily on tuition. Mitigating factors that were mentioned were the tuition rebate for bringing in new families, JETCO scholarship availability, other scholarships and discounting to make tuition affordable to all families. A recommendation was made that stakeholders be made aware of actual cost to educate each student and understand that everyone is receiving a scholarship.

Marketing suggestions. Of the respondents, 100% made suggestions regarding marketing that might improve retention and recruitment. Participant 1101 stated, "Marketing needs to be looked at through a competitive point of view; we need to ask ourselves, what are we doing better than anyone else and how do we get that message out to prospective families." Another stated, "We need to compare KDS with our competition and look at how we can improve" (Respondent 36). "We need to do a better job of using 'word of mouth' marketing to prospective families" (Participant 1112). Participant 1101 stated, "What do we do better than anyone else? . . . For example, a couple of years ago the competitive advantage that KDS offered was an all day kindergarten while other schools only offered half day. Another advantage is small class size. I think we need to look at this issue again and see that we do best and emphasize those things." Overpromising individualization has caused families to leave KDS when

parent expectations were not fully realized. "We need to plan more community activities and find ways to encourage personal contact with the community and our school" (Participant 1103).

Suggestions are listed in order of importance related to enrollment retention and recruitment numbers.

1. Focus retention efforts on the needs of fourth and fifth grade students/parents

    a. Connect and promote activities and success of middle school students

    b. Emphasize the success of alumnae in high school and beyond

2. Assign or hire someone to be responsible for recruitment at the fourth through seventh grades (Head reported that the board would like a 30% increase in enrollment in MS)

3. Improve word of mouth support of school

    a. Parlor meetings in all grades

    b. Elevator speech for all stakeholders to share with outside community

4. School wide events like pizza party, bring a friend, special friends day, Shabbat lunch or dinner, soup for middle school

5. Stronger connections with synagogue and Hebrew School

6. Families are contacted twice yearly by head/assistant head

7. Contracts are sent out earlier in the year

8. Grade level meetings with parents

9. Principal phone blasts for important events

10. Invest in a marquee sign in front of the school

11. Get directories and email lists of prospective students from other schools

12. Compare to competitors, know our completion and know our strengths

13. Extracurricular

14. Summer camps, after school activities, weekend events

Summary of Major Findings

      Organization. The summary of findings employs the major themes of this study that emerged from the collective responses of the participants. These themes were used because they provided a technique to synthesize all the diverse sets of data related to retention and recruitment. The data sets included the online survey, archival data, personal interviews, and field notes. Parents represented the largest proportion of respondents by group (71.5%), while faculty responded at 47.8% and board members responded at 27%. The stakeholder responses revealed that parents comprised 71% of the respondents; thus, their perceptions receive more attention in this study. The identified five themes are the factors that stakeholders perceived as important to retention and recruitment of students, namely positive relationships, living the school mission, affordability, a retention and recruitment plan, and clear communication. Each theme provides a different lens to examine the experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders.

      Positive relationships. The first theme to emerge is that the KDS community values positive relationships among the board of trustees, the heads of school, the teachers, and families of students. Forty percent of participants rated board of trustees relationships as an important factor in retention and recruitment. At the board level, four respondents expressed concern regarding board governance behavior and political strife, such as "Too many major decisions being made by too few board members that are completely out of touch with reality" (Respondent 116).

The head/principal relationship was rated by 60% of participants as extremely important. Archival documents reveal that KDS frequent administrative turnover. All of the new site administrators indicated they must serve as instructional leaders as well as leaders outside and within the school community.

The KDS community values the relationship between the teacher and the student. Data from the survey, interviews, field notes, as well as archival data supports the teacher-student relationships as the primary factor in determining reenrollment. Seventy-six percent of respondents rated teacher relationship as extremely important. Comments from both open-ended questions and interviews supported faculty relationships as the predominant factor in retention. "Focus on the teacher" was a common theme. Ninety percent of the respondents expressed that building relationships is essential in fostering and sustaining the partnership.

Archival data from parent email also confirms the importance of faculty relationships as crucial to retention. Seventy percent of interviewees spoke about teacher relationships with students and their families as a significant factor in retention. Sixteen of the responses described the positive quality of the teachers and student relationships. Respondent 100 stated, "The quality of the teachers is extremely important;" Respondent 123 stated, "Quality of education, values, strength of teachers;" and Respondent 11 stated, "Quality of education, values, strength of teachers." Ninety percent of the respondents expressed that building relationships is essential in fostering and sustaining the partnership.

Field notes included the observations by the dissertation chair during a site visit that included a parent open house. She commented that every parent was excited to have

their child at the school. When she asked why they remain at the school, the parents' first

response always related to the caring teachers and the way their child's needs were met.

Teacher/staff relationships were rated by 75% of participants as an extremely important

factor relating to retention. Sixteen responses described the positive quality of the

teacher and student relationships. Respondent 100 stated, "The quality of the teachers is

extremely important." Three respondents were concerned about the transition from lower

to middle school, stating, "Sense of community in middle school has dwindled. Overall

feeling of spirit and pride not what it used to be" (Respondent 114).

Relationship building was an emerging theme occurring as respondents were

asked about their perceptions of their role in engaging the community. When asked what

was their perception of their role in engaging the community, site administrators

expressed that it is an important and critical role. Fifty percent of the respondents

indicated the role the site administrator plays in fostering community partnerships is

based on their leadership skills and ability to lead. One respondent viewed administrators

"as the ring leader" in fostering community partnerships (Respondent 25). Three

respondents expressed similar sentiments: "I truly feel that the administrator sets the tone

for the school site, and that includes making a welcoming environment for parents and

community members, yet the idea of doing that is to ensure their school functions more

effectively when parents and the community are involved and engaged" (Respondent 12).

"I think it starts with the site administrators, because as a far as community partnerships

go, it has to do with building relationships with people. Then those relationships lead

into fostering connections in getting community members involved" (Respondent 4). "I

think they play a key role in that if they foster relationships with the community, they bring more things to the students" (Respondent 19).

Living the school mission. The second factor relating to retention and recruitment revealed by stakeholders was that the mission of the school and the focus on a balance of high quality secular learning and Jewish values and culture. The narrative responses showed that the balance between the academic program, the Judaic values, and student centered approach were a representation of the school's mission. Stakeholders found these factors important regarding retention and recruitment issues at KDS.

Eighty-one percent of respondents commented on the importance of the Jewish aspects of the school as well as the academic and religious culture of the school. Jewish values pervade the culture and activities of the school. Forty-five percent of respondents commented on academic issues as related to retention and recruitment. Eleven respondents made comments supporting the strong academic curriculum, noting individualized instruction and small classes. "Quality of progress of student achievement of academic skills and executive functioning and study skills" was mentioned by Respondent 70. Academic curriculum was rated extremely important and important by 77.2% of respondents. Flexibility in instructional needs of students was the second highest rated factor at 53.9%.

All survey respondents rated the secular academic program as extremely important. Current and former parents perceive the school to be non-selective (50%). Board members rated the school as 60% selective. Faculty rated the school evenly, with 50% stating it is selective and 50% stating it is non-selective. Technology was rated as important by current and former parents and board members, and it was rated as

extremely important by faculty. Eleven respondents made comments supporting the strong academic curriculum. Eight survey respondents expressed concerns regarding academic staff including teacher turnover, academic rigor, and others expressed specialized requests regarding the curriculum. For example, one stated, "We thought there would be more individual tailoring of education for children's specific needs and strengths. There was a lot of talk about this at one point, but it really didn't happen" (Respondent 79). Only 45% of interview respondents commented on academic issues as related to retention and recruitment.

Current and former parents, as well as faculty, rated the Judaic curriculum that emphasizes faith-based values and culture as an extremely important factor in retention and recruitment. Shabbat lunch was rated as important by current parents, faculty, and board members. Assemblies were rated as important by all stakeholders. Holiday observance was rated as important to parents, board members, and faculty. Eight survey participants responded positively about the religious reputation of the school. Respondent 23 appreciated the "Opportunity to grow in Judaism." Respondent 73 stated, "A strong Judaic curriculum and the sense of community is why my children are enrolled at KDS."

Eighty-one percent of interview respondents commented on the Jewish aspects of the school and the culture of the school. Jewish values pervade the culture and activities of the school. Respondent 1114 stated, "We should be solid in who we are. We attract Jewish families and offer opportunities for unaffiliated families to reconnect with their families." A concern was raised about the religiousness of the school. Some respondents felt it was too religious, stating, "I think we need to consider what it is like to be a non-

religious student at a faith-based school. Participant 114 stated, "Regarding policy, I feel

KDS should expand its applicant pool to include non-Jews." Conversely, other

respondents felt that the school should be more Jewish. Participant 1188 stated, "The

Judaic curriculum is not as strong as I would like." Participant 1163 stated, "I expected

the skill level of some of the Judaic teachers to be higher, a stronger Jewish identity for

the school with strong Jewish leadership, and to enroll Jewish kids exclusively." The

Jewish values and culture that are taught at KDS are an essential element of retention for

this school. Respondent 101 stated, "Teaching of good morals and importance of our

culture" was a significant factor in their decision to reenroll. Survey Respondent 101

stated the importance of "Whether my son is receiving a strong education: intellectual,

moral, and culturally Jewish."

The KDS community values a student focus as an extremely important factor in

retention. Social connections and friends were also rated as extremely important by 51%

of faculty and board members. Meeting individual needs of students was rated as

extremely important by 70.6% of stakeholders, making this the factor with the highest

rating. Extracurricular activities were rated as important by former parents, board

members, and faculty. Current parents rated this factor as somewhat important.

Flexibility in instructional needs of students was rated as extremely important by parents.

Support and enrichment programs were rated as important by all survey respondents.

Although parents expressed overall approval of the curriculum in the survey and

interviews, negative comments reflected the idea of more individualization within the

curriculum, as requested by Participant 1108. One asked for "better opportunities for

accelerated learners. When we were scouting schools we were told that students could

take high school level classes or even go to local high schools for advanced classes, but I don't know of anyone who had ever done that" (Participant 1117).

Safety was rated as extremely important by all stakeholders. Eleven respondents noted individualized instruction and small classes. "Quality of progress of student achievement of academic skills and executive functioning/study skills" was stated by Respondent 70. Seven respondents expressed student behavior at the school as a negative factor regarding retention. "My opinion of KDS has steadily declined over the 6 years we have been here. Six parents expressed concern regarding how the faculty handles bullying. For example, one stated, "The fact that bullying has been allowed to run rampant with no consequence has left me considering leaving KDS" (Respondent 60). Respondent 112 stated, "the way in which the administration is handling the bullying issues in middle school, they are not being dealt with effectively," but one parent commented that issues regarding bullying were "for the most part" handled as they came up (Respondent 27).

Affordability. Affordability was cited as a factor affecting retention by respondents, meaning that parents and board members rated the value of the cost for the educational benefits to students as an extremely important factor in retention. Twenty-seven percent of stakeholders mentioned finance as a factor in retention. Mitigating factors were the tuition rebate for bringing in new families, tax credit scholarship availability, other scholarships, and discounting to make tuition affordable to all families. Archival data from board of trustee meeting notes also confirm that stakeholders are concerned about tuition increases. Twenty-seven percent of stakeholders mentioned finance as a concern. Participant 120 stated, "The school is expensive and with the cost

increase (of tuition) year to year, parents want to know that they are getting a good return on the money they spend on tuition, especially in light of a free charter school option." Archival data from board of trustee meeting notes also confirm that stakeholders are concerned about tuition increases.

Need for retention and recruitment plan. The need for retention and recruitment programs at KDS was identified as a serious concern for administration and board. Data from interviews revealed that the KDS community is unaware of any retention activities beyond second grade and that no one seems responsible to be actively pursuing retention of students. Admissions data shows a majority of applications were made at the kindergarten level followed closely by first grade (Table 9). Applications also significantly decrease by students from second thorough eighth grade. Also, inquiries and tours drop significantly after first grade. Data indicate that there is little admission for new students after first grade. Admissions records show that students typically make the decision to transfer from KDS to another school between fourth and fifth grades or between fifth and sixth grades. At present, recruitment occurs primarily at the entry level of the school.

Respondents were asked during interviews about their perceptions regarding retention activities on campus. Fifty percent of interviewees could not identify any retention policies. However, all interview respondents made suggestions regarding marketing and what ideas they thought might improve retention. The admissions officer stated that "KDS is not actively pursuing any retention programs." School records indicate that the school does not perform exit interviews. Review of school records and archival documents revealed no retention and recruitment activities or a retention plan in

the last 5 years. Three respondents, including the head of school, stated concern about retaining students during the transition from lower to middle school. Table 11 shows the attrition rates in these grades. In the 2008-2009 school year, six students left KDS. In the 2009-2010 school year, eight students did not re-enroll. In the 2010-2011 school year, five students did not reenroll. During the 2011-2012 school year KDS had the greatest rate at attrition with 18 students electing not to return. Findings revealed that the KDS community is largely unaware of any retention activities.

Clear communication. Clear communication was rated as extremely important by all stakeholders. Seven survey participants made comments on the communication between students, parents, and other staff. Respondent 108 stated, "Feeling like there is an open door when there are concerns." Respondent 104 stated, "Communication with parents via email to keep us involved and aware of our children's needs." Two survey participants emphasized the need to improve parent school communication. When stakeholders bring issues to the attention of administration they want timely feedback and that the issue was attended to. Participant 1103 stated, "The area that needs the most work is communication."

Ninety-three percent of respondents interviewed expressed the view that communication is key to building and nurturing any type of collaborative partnership between KDS and the parents. Communication skills listed by respondents included strong written and verbal communication skills, use of technology, and knowing and understanding individual needs of students. Fifty-three percent of the respondents stated that goals to engage the community were an extremely important factor in retaining students at KDS.

Respondents noted these examples of positive communication to improve retention: a weekly newsletter; regular contact between teacher and parents; participating in mini-conferences with parents at the end of the school day; administrators greeting students as they are dropped off in the morning and being visible throughout the day; as well as faculty, staff, and administration engaging in regular communication with students, parents, and each other throughout the school day.

Respondents shared many insights regarding the quality of communication at KDS. "One of the most important skills for an administrator to develop is to learn what the community partner wants to get out of the partnership, to identify what their interest is, and then to be able to communicate how the school site would be a match for the goals of the community partners" (Respondent 3). "You have to have superior communication skills that include writing skills, speaking, and listening skills" (Respondent 20). "I think that you need people skills, the ability to communicate effectively. . . . I've sent a lot of letters out to community organizations in the area and businesses, and I think that good written skills are important to communicate the needs of the school" (Respondent 16). Respondents also indicated that site administrators must be accessible.

Respondents expressed concern over the school's reputation in the community and the need to build relationships with the community at large.

> I think the perception of KDS to the public is not as high as it could be, and more important should be. The perception of the families who have their kids enrolled at KDS is one thing and very important . . . but what is the perception of KDS to the parents who chose not to enroll their children there? The KDS leaders, from the school administrators . . . to the teachers . . . to the board . . . to the parents . .

. they all need to be pro-active not just for KDS business . . . but to commit to be

engaged as KDS ambassadors that visibly are part of the . . . community and not

operate in a KDS vacuum. Without a major vision and attitude shift from the

KDS board . . . and with the future fast approaching. . . . I ask the same question

many others ask . . . What will the reality be for KDS in years to come?

(Respondent 69)

Respondents pointed out that the transition to middle school was made more

difficult due to a lack of relationship building. One simply stated, "The middle school

has a perceived reputation of not being inclusive" (Respondent 84). Another elaborated

as follows:

There is an abrupt change in the relationship of parents to the school at the

transition into middle school. The feeling of 'family' is no longer there. This

shift was felt by many of the parents in our son's cohort. Even though this has

come up a number of times with the school administration, I have always been

surprised that no one from the administration/board has tried to understand why?

(Respondent 82)

Respondents indicated that the site administrators must be accessible. Fifty-three

percent of the respondents stated the importance of getting information out to the

community about their school sites' needs, mission, vision, and goals also supports their

efforts of engaging the community. One respondent summed it up best by saying, "I'm

the face of my school. Principals are the face of their schools" (Respondent 20). A site

administrator is the main person responsible for promoting the school. The general belief

of the respondents was that community organizations and businesses must be aware of

what is happening in the school in order to be responsive to the school's needs.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter 5 summarizes the research presented in this case study and important themes that emerged, as well as conclusions and recommendations for improvement of retention and recruitment for King David School (KDS).

Statement of the Problem

Enrollment is declining at KDS, a small Kindergarten through eighth grade urban, independent, faith-based, Jewish day school in the southwest United States. Enrollment at its peak was over 200 students and now has declined to 156 students; however, the reasons for this decline are currently unknown. The board of directors is taking on the responsibility to preserve the school as it currently stands but is not sure what it should do to change the trend in lower retention and recruitment.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to examine the factors and issues associated with changes in student enrollment at KDS. The intent is to propose ideas to be taken by the board of directors, administration, and other stakeholders to revitalize this school.

This study was important for multiple reasons. The findings from this study may assist administrators in public, charter, and independent schools in determining what parents and students most value about their current school. School administrators could then implement practices and policies that encourage and maintain student enrollment and retention and recruitment throughout K-12 education in independent schools.

In addition, this mixed-methods case study augmented existing research on student retention and recruitment with a particular emphasis on independent schools. Understanding the factors that influence retention and recruitment can inform policy

makers and school administrators as to why parents initially choose to enroll and subsequently reenroll their children at a particular school. Examining how these variables change as students move from elementary to middle school can influence policy with respect to retention and recruitment practices and how to meet parents' and students' social and educational expectations.

As private schools and charter schools compete with each other for students and resources, recruiting and retaining students becomes extremely important to the success of any independent school. Students and their families choose not to re-enroll for various reasons. Some of these reasons are outside of the school's control. Specifically, students who graduate or move away are not considered eligible for re-enrollment. Attrition however, deals with the percentage of students who are eligible to re-enroll and do not. These students may leave school for many reasons, such as financial constraints, poor institutional fit, or lack of academic success.

While attrition relates to eligible students who elect not to return, retention or re-enrollment relates to the students who elect to stay at the school they are currently attending. As schools shift their focus from why students leave to why they stay enrolled, schools can build on their success and improve consistent and predictable enrollment. As schools retain more students, once they are admitted, enrollment will hold steady. This study also examined previous research related to why students elect to remain enrolled. The aim of this study was to provide insight into factors that influence retention and recruitment and understand how to more effectively respond to the needs of students and parents at KDS.

Restatement of Research Questions

1. What is stakeholders' understanding of the student retention and recruitment at an independent faith-based day school?

2. What actions are stakeholders aware of that have been taken to improve student retention and recruitment at an independent faith-based day school?

3. What policy changes do stakeholders believe would make a positive impact on student retention and recruitment at an independent faith-based day school?

4. What level of importance do stakeholders place on various factors that affect student retention and recruitment policies?

Research questions 1 through 3 were primarily answered through semi-structured interviews, while research question 4 was primarily answered through an online survey.

Research Methodology

A mixed-methods case study was chosen to answer the research questions of how and why retention and recruitment are declining. A case study was determined to be suitable method of study (Yin, 2013). In order to answer the questions of how and why, this study looked at one school, KDS. The data was collected and conclusions were drawn from the research questions that provided a conceptual framework and an action plan for getting from the questions to a set of conclusions.

This study applied mixed-methods and included an online survey for parents and school stakeholders, archival documents, school records, and personal interviews with parents and stakeholders. The methods included both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

A total of 530 surveys were sent to stakeholders using Survey Monkey. Of the 123 returned surveys; 72 were from current parents, 16 from former parents, 5 from board members, 22 from faculty, and 11 other (1 parent miss-identified, 1 alumnus, 1 unidentified, and 8 non-respondents). After the quantitative data collection was complete, a series of personal interviews occurred. The head of school selected himself as KDS head of school, the assistant head of school, 5 board members (who may also be current parents), director of admissions, one office staff member, and 6 classroom teachers. The researcher contacted 20 parents by email, and 6 of these parents expressed interest. The researcher interviewed these parents, four by phone and two in person. The interviews served as an opportunity to discuss with stakeholders their perceptions of retention and recruitment in a more detailed way and allowed the researcher to confirm and explain the findings from the survey. An additional eight interviews (2 parents, 2 teachers, and 2 administrators, and 2 staff members) were conducted by an onsite administrator.

This kindergarten through eighth grade independent school has a coed student population of 156. It is a Pluralistic Jewish Day School and accredited by both the National Association of Independent Schools and North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI). Ninety-five percent of the school population is Jewish, and 75% are unaffiliated with a specific synagogue. The parent body is diverse in ethnicity and income. Faculty includes 14 females and 5 males, with an average of 5 years teaching at this school. Administration includes 3 males and 3 females with an average tenure of less than 5 years. The board of trustees has 17 members.

Summary of Major Findings

Organization. The summary of findings employs the major themes of this study that emerged from the collective responses of the participants. These themes were used because they provided a framework to synthesize all the diverse sets of data related to retention and recruitment. The data sets included the online survey, archival data, personal interviews, and field notes. Faculty responded at 47.8% of the potential faculty respondents, while board members responded at 27%. The stakeholder responses revealed that parents comprised 71% of the respondents; thus, their perceptions receive more attention in this study.

The identified five themes are the factors that stakeholders perceived as important to retention and recruitment of students, namely positive relationships, living the school mission, affordability, a retention and recruitment plan, and clear communication. Each theme provides a different lens to examine the experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders.

Positive relationships. The first theme to emerge is that the KDS community values positive relationships among the board of trustees, the heads of school, the teachers, and students and their families. Forty percent of participants rated board of trustee relationships as an important factor in retention. At the board level, four respondents expressed concern regarding board governance behavior and political strife.

The head/principal relationship was rated by 60% of participants as extremely important. Archival documents reveal that KDS frequent administrative turnover. All of the new site administrators indicated they must serve as instructional leaders as well as leaders outside and within the school community.

The KDS community values the relationship between the teacher and the student. Data from the survey, interviews, field notes, as well as archival data supports the teacher-student relationships as the primary factor in determining reenrollment. Seventy-six percent of respondents rated teacher relationship as extremely important. Comments from both open-ended questions and interviews supported faculty relationships as the predominant factor in retention. "Focus on the teacher" was a common theme. Ninety percent of the respondents expressed that building relationships is essential in fostering and sustaining the partnership.

Archival data from parent emails also confirm the importance of faculty relationships as crucial to retention. Seventy percent of interviewees spoke about teacher relationships with students and their families as a significant factor in retention. Ninety percent of the respondents expressed that building relationships is essential in fostering and sustaining the partnership.

Field notes recorded the observations by the dissertation chair during a site visit that included a parent open house. She commented that every parent was excited to have their child at the school. When she asked why they remain at the school, the parents' first response always related to the caring teachers and the way their child's needs were met. Teacher/staff relationships was rated by 75% of participants as an extremely important factor relating to retention.

Relationship building was an emerging theme occurring as respondents were asked about their perceptions of their role in engaging the community. When asked what was their perception of their role in engaging the community, site administrators expressed that it is an important and critical role. Fifty percent of the respondents

indicated the role the site administrator plays in fostering community partnerships is based on their leadership skills and ability to lead.

Living the school mission. The second factor relating to retention revealed by stakeholders was the mission of the school and the focus on a balance of high quality secular learning and Jewish values and culture. The narrative responses showed that the balance between the academic program, the Judaic values, and student centered approach were a representation of the school's mission. Stakeholders found these factors provided deep insight into the perceptions of stakeholders regarding retention issues at KDS.

Eighty-one percent of respondents commented on the importance of the Jewish aspects of the school as well as the academic and religious culture of the school. Jewish values pervade the culture and activities of the school. Forty-five percent of respondents commented on academic issues as related to retention. Eleven respondents made comments supporting the strong academic curriculum, noting individualized instruction and small classes. Academic curriculum was rated as *extremely important* or as *important* by 77.2% of respondents. Flexibility in instructional needs of students was the second highest rated factor at 53.9% and was rated as extremely important and important.

All survey respondents rated the secular academic program as extremely important. Current and former parents perceive the school to be non-selective (50%). Board members rated the school as 60% selective. Faculty rated the school evenly at 50% selective and non-selective. Technology was rated as important by current and former parents and board members, and was rated as extremely important by the faculty. Eleven respondents made comments supporting the strong academic curriculum. Eight survey respondents expressed concerns regarding academic staff including teacher

turnover and academic rigor, while others expressed specialized requests regarding the curriculum. Only 45% of interview respondents commented on academic issues as related to retention.

Current and former parents, as well as faculty, rated the Judaic curriculum that emphasizes faith-based values and culture as an extremely important factor in retention. Shabbat lunch was rated as important by current parents, faculty, and board members. Assemblies were rated as important by all constituencies. Holiday observance was rated as important to parents, board members, and faculty. Eight survey participants responded positively about the religious reputation of the school. Some felt it was too religious, while other respondents felt that the school should be more Jewish.

The KDS community values a student focus as an extremely important factor in retention. Social connections and friends were also rated as extremely important at 25.7% of respondents. Meeting individual needs of students was rated as extremely important by 70.6% of stakeholders, making it the highest rating. Extracurricular activities were rated as important by former parents, board members, and faculty. Current parents rated this factor as somewhat important. Flexibility in instructional needs of students was rated as extremely important by parents. Support and enrichment programs were rated as important by all survey respondents. Although parents seemed happy with the overall curriculum, negative comments reflected the desire for more individualization within the curriculum. Safety was rated as extremely important by all stakeholders. Eleven respondents noted the importance of individualized instruction and small classes. Seven respondents expressed student behavior at the school as a negative

factor regarding retention. Six parents expressed concern regarding how the faculty handles bullying, though others felt bullying was addressed adequately.

Affordability. Affordability was indicated as a factor affecting retention and recruitment by respondents. Parents and board members rated the value of the cost for the educational benefits to students as an extremely important factor. Twenty-seven percent of stakeholders mentioned finance as a factor in retention and recruitment. Mitigating factors were the tuition rebate for bringing in new families, tax credit scholarship availability, other scholarships, and discounting to make tuition affordable to all families. Archival data from board of trustees meeting notes also confirm that stakeholders are concerned about tuition increases. Twenty-seven percent of stakeholders mentioned finance as a concern. Archival data from board of trustees meeting notes also confirm that stakeholders are concerned about tuition increases.

Need for retention and recruitment plan. The need for retention and recruitment programs at KDS was identified as a serious concern for administration and the board. Admissions data shows a majority of applications were made at the kindergarten level, followed closely by first grade (Table 9). Applications also significantly decrease by students from second through eighth grade. Also, inquiries and tours drop significantly after first grade. Data indicate that there is little recruitment effort for new students after first grade. Admissions records show that students typically make the decision to transfer from KDS to another school between fourth and fifth grades or between fifth and sixth grades. At present, recruitment occurs primarily at the entry level of the school. Additionally, the admissions officer is designated for recruitment only.

Respondents were asked during interviews about their perceptions regarding retention and recruitment activities on campus. Fifty percent of interviewees could not identify any retention and recruitment policies. However, all interview respondents made suggestions regarding marketing and what ideas they thought might improve retention and recruitment. The admissions officer stated that "KDS is not actively pursuing any retention programs." Three respondents, including the head of school, stated concern about retaining students during the transition from lower to middle school. School records indicate that the school does not perform exit interviews. Review of school records and archival documents revealed no retention and recruitment activities or a related plan in the last 5 years. Findings revealed that the KDS community is unaware of any retention and recruitment activities.

Clear communication. Clear communication was rated as extremely important by all stakeholders. Two survey participants emphasized the need to improve school-to-parent communication. When stakeholders bring issues to the attention of administration, they want timely feedback and want to know that the issue was attended to.

Ninety-three percent of respondents interviewed expressed the view that communication is key to building and nurturing any type of collaborative partnership between KDS and the parents. Communication skills listed by respondents included strong written and verbal communication skills, use of technology, and knowing and understanding individual needs of students. Fifty-three percent of the respondents stated getting information out to the community about their school sites' needs, mission, vision, and goals to engage the community was an extremely important factor in retaining students at KDS.

Respondents noted examples of positive communication to improve retention including a weekly newsletter; regular contact between teacher and parents; participating in mini-conferences with parents at the end of the school day; administrators greeting students as they are dropped off in the morning; administrators being visible in the school throughout the day; as well as faculty, staff, and administration engaging in regular communication with students, parents, and each other throughout the school day. Respondents also indicated site administrators must be accessible.

Conclusions

The survey, interviews, and archival data revealed various factors that affect student retention and recruitment policies, as assessed through the survey and the interviews. The factors that were important for retention and recruitment, according to stakeholders, were positive relationships, living the school mission, affordability, clear communication, and a plan of action for retention and recruitment. Based on the results of this study, the predominant issues are as follows: relationship building by administration, enhancing communication from administration to the school community, finding the right balance between faith based and academic curriculum, exclusivity versus inclusivity of non-Jewish students, tuition support, recruiting throughout the grade levels, and improving the school's marketing strategy. Based upon the results of this study, the seven conclusions have been drawn. These are presented in the following paragraphs.

Conclusion 1. The first conclusion is that stakeholders perceive that positive relationships between school and family are an essential factor in student retention at an independent Jewish day school. Interviews confirm strong communal ties among the

parents at KDS are an important factor in determining reenrollment. The overarching theme of these stakeholders was the importance of building positive relationships among the board of trustees, the head of school, the teachers, and the students' families. Ninety percent of the respondents to the survey and interviews expressed that building relationships is essential in fostering and sustaining the partnership. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated the role the site administrator plays in fostering community partnerships is based on their leadership skills.

Archival data from parent emails also confirms the importance of relationships as crucial to retention. During the observation by the dissertation chair during a site visit that included a parent open house, she commented that every parent was excited to have their child at the school. When she asked why they remain at the school, the parent's first response always related to the caring teachers and the way their child's needs were met. However, stakeholders from the survey were adamant that bullying was an unresolved issue. Six parents expressed concern regarding how the faculty handles bullying.

Research indicates that there is a common belief that private schools produce better results than their public school counterparts (Rothstein et al., 1999). Independent school teachers and administrators are more accountable to parents (Hewitt-Edmond, 2009). Tinto (2006) studied what the school could do to encourage success in retention. In his study, teacher involvement was a key factor in retaining students. Tinto stated, "the actions of the faculty, especially in the classroom, are key to institutional efforts to enhance student retention" (p. 5). Sykes (1996) also found that faculty or staff interaction with families was a factor that influences retention.

Tinto and Cullen (1973) found that dropout was seen as a "multidimensional process based on the interaction between the individual and the institution" (p. 41). Spady (1971), who studied dropout in community college, concluded that attrition was influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships. In the case of KDS, current and former parents are represented as stakeholders on the board of trustees, as teachers, and as members of the administration. In this study parent perception represents the bulk of the data. Parents are also the primary decision makers regarding whether or not to reenroll their children. Bean (1980) identified parents' education level and family approval as variables that influenced the decision to reenroll. Tinto (1975) and Tinto and Cullen (1973) theorized that family characteristics also played a role in attrition.

In order for student retention programs to be successful, administrative support is essential. Trustees determine the school's mission, vision, strategic goals, and policy positions; they must also be able and willing to articulate the mission in formal and informal situations (NAIS, 2013). An effective board understands a school's mission and history then works to move the mission of the school forward. Boards provide a less recognized but critical source of leadership for the organization. The board has one employee and that is the head of school (NAIS, 2013). Respondents expressed that the administrator sets the tone for the school site. Hernandez (1996) agrees, "The primary driving influence for creating and maintaining organizational culture is the leadership" (p. 5). Thus leaders must promote positive relations with families.

Conclusion 2. The second conclusion is that stakeholders perceive that the mission of the school—the focus on a balance of high quality general studies, Jewish curriculum, and values and culture—is the second essential factor in student retention at

this faith based, independent Jewish Day School. Stakeholders at KDS responded positively to the idea of an academically rigorous school, within a positive Jewish environment (survey Respondents 121, 111, 73, 61, 30, 23 and interview Participants 1122, 1114, 1105).

Eighty-one percent of respondents commented on the importance of the academic aspects of the school as well as the Judiacs and religious culture of the school. Forty-five percent of respondents commented on academic issues as related to retention. Respondents made comments supporting the strong academic curriculum, noting individualized instruction and small classes. Flexibility in instructional needs of students was rated by 53.9% survey respondents as extremely important or important. Academic curriculum was rated extremely important and important by 77.2% of respondents. Jewish values pervade the culture and activities of the school.

This study's findings are supported by Spady (1970), who concluded that shared values within a group created an atmosphere of friendship, which leads to improved retention. In this school's case academic excellence, Jewish curriculum, and values that are stated in KDS mission statement confirm that a strong academic curriculum within a shared pluralistic environment is a desirable factor in retention of students for this community.

Stakeholders perceive KDS as an academically challenging school environment with a strong academic reputation (survey Respondents 75, 70, 60, 65, 39, 37, 11, 4 and interview Participants 1010, 1113, 1102, 1114, 1117, 1118, 1119, 1120). Research supports conclusion that academic rigor was a deciding factor in retention (Carden, 2005). Additionally, families who re-enrolled listed academic rigor and faculty expertise

as important factors in their re-enrollment decision process in private schools (Carden, 2005; ISM, 2010b). Research supports the finding of this study in that (a) parents who choose independent schools look to the school to provide an enriched curriculum and high academic achievement and that (b) academic competency is important in retention (ISM, 2010b).

Respondents in the survey and interview expressed a desire to promote Jewish values. However, respondents could not recall the school's school mission statement (Interview Participants 1008, 1009, 1010), and 90% of respondents from the survey could not identify any of the school's retention policies. Respondent 1118 stated, "Retention is enhanced with a clear mission statement. I believe KDS has one. It is written somewhere?" Interviews with head of school and assistant head of school did reveal that they knew the location of the school mission and could recite it. Regarding retention policies, interviews confirm that parents did not know of any retention policies except that students were counseled out if they did not fit (Respondent 1114, 1101, 1109, 1111). Research points to successful schools having a well-defined purpose and set of beliefs that are clearly articulated. These values are communicated in qualitative terms and are communicated clearly throughout the school (ISM, 2010c; Walner, 2000). Based on interviews and surveys with stakeholders; the mission statement needs to be communicated more effectively in order to have a positive effect on retention.

Conclusion 3. The third conclusion is that stakeholders perceived a need for better marketing and recruiting throughout fifth grade. Respondents noted that KDS should improve its institutional commitment by improving the school's marketing to prospective families. The strategic plan of the school should include an institutional

action program including marketing as a means of reducing student attrition. Interview respondents also suggested targeting student families in the community that would be likely to connect to the school's mission, including reaching out to the local synagogues as well as marketing at city wide events with the intention of connecting to Jews who are currently unaffiliated with any particular synagogue.

Data from field notes also indicates that the school would have success in marketing to non-Jews who appreciated the school's mission and culture. However, it was also noted that marketing to non-Jews would need to be a decision approved at the board level. Archival data from admissions records suggests recruiting throughout all grade levels would not only increase enrollment but improve overall retention. Data from admissions records indicate that students and families who inquire and tour the school typically enroll (see Table 8). As the KDS increases enrollment through improved recruitment, parents gain confidence in their school choice and retention improves.

One significant way KDS can improve its institutional commitment is by improving the school's marketing to prospective families. Research by Sykes (1996) supports the findings in this study. Improved recruitment is a crucial element in retention. Bean (1980) stated that "Institutional commitment was the most important variable in explaining dropout for students" (p. 29). Research indicates that a community approach to problem solving is often more effective that a top down approach (Hiatt-Michael, 2012). Parents' that are able to connect with the school's culture through involvement in recruitment and retention will feel connected to the school's culture, and with that connection will come a feeling of stability (Lindsey et al., 2003), which improves retention. Research by Tinto (2006) as well as Beal and Noel (1979) support

the findings of this study and concluded in their research that the action plan should target specific groups of students.

Conclusion 4. The fourth conclusion is that stakeholders are concerned about affordability and perceive a need for financial aid as an issue in retention. Sixty-nine percent of current parents and 50% of former parents rated the issue of financial aid as an extremely important factor in retention. The issue of affordability is a primary responsibility of the board. Within the issue of financial responsibility comes the question of affordability and what type of student the school will service. Affordability is an ongoing concern for many families (survey Respondents 122, 17 and interview Participants 1010, 1103, 1120).

The KDS mission statement states that the board "accepts accountability for both the financial stability and the financial future of the institution, engaging in strategic financial planning, assuming primary responsibility for the preservation of capital assets and endowments, overseeing operating budgets, and participating actively in fund raising." Financial support is pivotal in making KDS a viable option for middle class families. The tuition rebate for bringing in new families, state tax credit scholarship availability, in addition to other scholarships and discounting make tuition affordable to all families. Families who attend KDS should be made aware of actual cost to the school to educate each student and understand that even full-pay students are not covering the full cost of school operations on a per-capita basis.

Research supports the findings in this study that parents cite financial reasons and affordability as a significant issue in student retention (NAIS, n.d.; RAVSAK, n.d.). Bassett (2007) also found that affordability and the school's ability to reduce tuition

increase is an important factor in retention. Raymond (2007) found that adequate financial aid is an important factor in attracting and retaining students. Sykes (1996) supported the findings in this study, stating, "Too often parents choose to discontinue enrollment because of financial considerations; the school should assume that if financial aid is necessary to complete the enrollment process, it will also be necessary for continued enrollment" (p. 106). The National Association of Independent Schools looked at attrition in private schools and found that financial reasons were cited as the determining factor for 16.9% of students not returning. Tuition, financial aid, and endowment are all factors in retaining students. Affordability is consistently mentioned as a consideration in retention (Gallanter, 1994; Hollenbeck, 2008; Pegeas, 2006; Resnick, 2006; Sykes, 1996; Walner, 2000). Independent School Management (2010a) states, "Attrition will closely correlate with the parents' perception of the value of the education that their children are receiving" (p. 1). Mitchell and Galindo (2002) found that schools that offset tuition with financial aid and grants are more likely to have low attrition. Mitchell (2003) and Raymond (2007) recommendations included financial aid and affordability as important factors in retaining students. He concluded that clarity in school mission and meaningful fundraising was essential in retaining these students. Affordability for parents may be an important factor in retaining students. Basset (2007) states, "Schools must seek ways to significantly reduce tuition or at least moderate increases if they have any hope of attracting more families into the independent school fold" (p. 1).

Conclusion 5. The fifth conclusion is that the school administration needs to focus on improving positive communication with parents and the community. An

overwhelming 93% of the respondents interviewed expressed the view that communication is key to building and nurturing any type of collaborative partnership. Fifty-three percent of the respondents stated getting information out to the community about their school sites' needs, mission, vision, and goals also supports their efforts of engaging the community. Communication skills included having strong written and verbal communication skills, use of technology, and knowing and understanding the school community's needs. Fine-tuning communication from administration to families was listed by respondents as an issue in retention.

Research from the literature review supports the findings in the study that that clear communication improved parent satisfaction and retention (Hewitt-Edmond, 2009; Sgro, 2006; Zarybnisky, 2010). Bolman and Deal (2002) stress the importance of understanding an organization's culture and communicating that knowledge to members of the community. Research supports the findings in this study that communication with parents is a reason for school choice satisfaction and retention (Choy, 1997). Schnell (2011) also listed communication, along with other factors, as significant. ISM (2010b) agreed with the findings of this study and found that home communication was a significant factor in student retention.

Conclusion 6. From the findings of this study, a model noting the factors that affect retention at faith-based independent schools was developed. The purposes of this model are to give stakeholders a summary of the findings of this study, which provides a framework and direction for future action to improve retention at this independent faith-based school. See Figure 5.
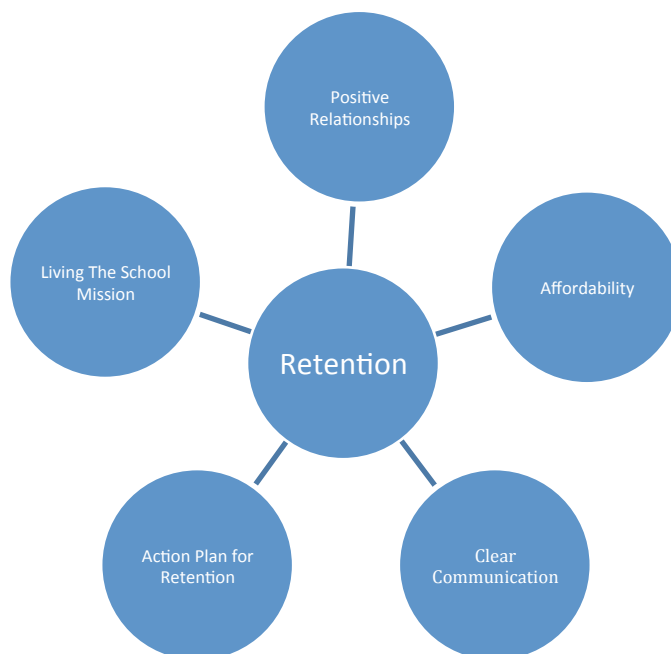
Figure 5. Retention model.

Conclusion 7. Faith-based independent schools are faced with seven recurring issues that deter retention of students. Based on the results of this study, the predominant issues are: relationship building by administration, fine tuning communication from administration to the school community, finding the right balance between faith based and academic curriculum, exclusivity versus inclusivity of non-Jewish students, tuition support, recruiting throughout the grade levels, and improving the school's marketing strategy. These issues are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Relationship building by administration. Respondents expressed concern over the school's reputation in the community and the need to build relationships with the community at large. Respondents pointed out that the transition to middle school was made more difficult due to a lack of relationship building. Respondents indicated that the

site administrators must be accessible. Fifty-three percent of the respondents stated that getting information out to the community about their school sites' needs, mission, vision, and goals also supports their efforts of engaging the community. A site administrator is the main person responsible for promoting the school. The general belief of the respondents was that community organizations and businesses must be aware of what is happening in the school in order to be responsive to the school's needs.

Finding the right balance between faith based and academic curriculum. Some respondents expressed a desire for balance between the faith-based and academic curriculum. Others expressed an interest in a more academic focus. Still other respondents expressed satisfaction with the curriculum but the deciding factor regarding re-enrollment was the focus on Jewish values and culture

Deviant student behavior. The findings revealed that most respondents expressed satisfaction with the way KDS handles discipline issues, "My expectation that tensions between teachers and administrators, and of tension among the students (cliques, bullying, harsh economic and social stratification) would be relatively high has not been fulfilled. These problems exist, but they are not grave" (Respondent 4).

However, respondents who expressed concern over student behavior were adamant that this was a serious issue the KDS needs to resolve. These respondents tended to focus on repetitive serious behavior issues of a particular student. Respondents expressed concern regarding classroom management by teachers, such as, "I often hear my children complaining about teachers not listening to them and worrying too much about classroom management and discipline issues that in a small private school should not be such a big part of the mix . . . an issue tied to competency in classroom

management on the part of a number of faculty that need better skills and training" (Respondent 37).

Exclusivity versus inclusivity of non-Jewish students. A concern was raised about the Jewishness of the school. Several respondents expressed that their initial concern regarding Jewish culture and inclusivity had not occurred. One commented, "I was worried it would be too Jewish. The level of Jewishness works for our family" (Respondent 31). Other respondents expressed the feeling that the school could do more to promote its faith-based values. Participant 1188 stated, "The Judaic curriculum is not as strong as I would like." Participant 1163 stated, "I expected the skill level of some of the Judaic teachers to be higher, a stronger Jewish identity for the school with strong Jewish leadership, and to enroll Jewish kids exclusively."

Tuition support. Affordability is an ongoing concern for many families (survey Respondents, 122, 17 and interview Participants 1010, 1103, 1120). Respondents expressed concern over affordability and tuition increases from one year to the next. Participant 120 stated, "The school is expensive and the cost increase (of tuition) year to year, parents want to know that they are getting a good return on the money they spend on tuition, especially in light of a free charter school option." Research supports the findings in this study that parents cite financial reasons and affordability as a significant issue in student retention (NAIS, n.d.; RAVSAK, n.d.). Sixty-nine percent of current parents and 50% of former parents rated the issue of financial aid as an extremely important factor in retention. School records indicate that 60% of families enrolled at KDS receive financial aid. Financial aid requests also confirm that a majority of KDS families are middle income earners. Field notes indicate that parents want to be able to

plan for tuition increases and have confidence that their individual financial aid award will be consistent.

Recruiting throughout the grade levels. Lack of recruitment beyond second grade is a concern for administration. Admissions data shows a significant majority of applications were made at the kindergarten level followed closely by first grade (Table 9). Applications also remarkably decrease for students from second thorough eighth grade. Archival data from admissions records suggests recruiting throughout all grade levels would not only increase enrollment but improve overall retention. Data from admissions records indicate that students and families who inquire and tour the school typically enroll. As the KDS increases enrollment through improved recruitment, parents gain confidence in their school choice and retention improves.

Improving the school's marketing strategy. Independent, faith-based schools must continually improve their marketing strategies to meet demands of competition. Based on the survey results, research, and interviews, KDS will be more successful in reducing attrition by involving the school community in marketing the school to the broader community. One hundred percent of respondents made suggestions regarding marketing suggestions that might improve retention, which are detailed in Chapter 4. Some include (a) focusing retention on fourth and fifth grade students, as this is a time of greater attrition; (b) assign recruitment responsibilities; (c) improved word of mouth support; (d) school-wide fun events; (e) connections with Jewish institutions; (f) more contact from administration to school; (g) contracts sent earlier; (h) grade level meetings with parents; (i) phone blasts for important events and marquee to advertise; (j) and

extracurricular activities for students, such as after school, weekend, and summer events, (k) more competitive considering similarly attractive schooling.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following eight recommendations are listed to guide future educators in examining the factors associated with changes in student enrollment and the steps that should be taken by the board of directors, administration, faculty, and other stakeholders to revitalize a school with the intent to increase student retention and enrollment.

Recommendation 1. Administrators and faculty of an independent school must continually focus on positive relationship building with students and families. Parents consider this to be essential if they will continue to enroll their child in the school. The following are some important elements that should be maintained to continue positive relationships. The administrators should be readily accessible to families. For example, at this site, an administrator was always at the curb when the students were dropped off in the morning. Parents could readily exchange information and felt comfortable in these daily exchanges. Survey participants also listed social connections, and friends were also rated as extremely important at 51%. Respondent 38 stated, "The interaction between parents and teachers is extremely important to me."

Parents in interviews also commented on community activities as a way to build relationships. The Friday evening Shabbat dinners by grade level, the all school assemblies, Purim, Chanukah, and other Jewish holidays that are celebrated on campus, open house, and Kosher pizza night were events parents listed as positive ways in which KDS builds a sense of community.

KDS should look at the feasibility of providing more extracurricular activities as a way to build relationships and social connections within the community. Extracurricular activities were rated on the survey as important by former parents, board members, and faculty. Parents also see the use of technology as a way to improve community. Weekly email updates by faculty on what is occurring in the classroom, regular and constant updates to social media helps parents feel connected when they are not on campus, regular contact with teachers through the online grade book and teacher web pages, all are ways in which the school can build relationships among parents and the school community.

Although the number of parents that are concerned about bullying is relatively small, these parents are very vocal and are affecting retention efforts at KDS. The school should work to resolve bullying issues quickly and develop an action plan that includes parent, faculty, and administrative involvement so all stakeholders feel they are being heard on this issue and are invested in the resolution of the issue. Parents have also commented on the welcoming nature of current students and parents toward new students in which KDS effectively builds positive relationships among its members.

Recommendation 2. The board members, administrators, and staff should regularly focus decision-making on the school's mission. In this specific school, stakeholders should revaluate the balance between academic rigor and Judaic values by focusing on the needs of students and their parents. Participant 1113 stated, "We need to be solid in what we are, be solid in our curriculum and let that speak for itself." Carden (2005) states, "The school partners with the parents to provide academic excellence for its students." An effective board understands a school's mission and history and works to move the mission of the school forward. Boards provide a less recognized but critical

source of leadership for the organization. In order for student retention programs to be successful, administrative support is essential. Trustees determine the school's mission, vision, strategic goals, and policy positions; they must also be able and willing to articulate the mission in formal and informal situations (NAIS, 2013). The board has one employee and that is the head of school (NAIS, 2013). Hernandez (1996) states, "The primary driving influence for creating and maintaining organizational culture is the leadership" (p. 5).

In order to make the mission of the school more prevalent in the community, it is recommended that the mission statement be posted on the enrollment contract, in the front lobby, in each classroom, and in other areas where stakeholders gather. The mission statement should be mentioned and identified regularly in newsletters and other correspondence from the head of school to parents and staff. Defining and communicating the mission of the school is an essential factor of retention for KDS.

Based on the survey results, research, and interviews, KDS will be more successful in reducing attrition by remaining consistent with its core mission and academic programming instead of trying to focus on too many specialized programs. Based on the survey results, students may leave due to improper intuitional fit. However, that majority of families who are enrolled are committed to the strong liberal arts focused program as well as the teachers. They do not want the school to radically change its curriculum. In order to maximize retention efforts, students at KDS want to feel their education is valued by non-Jews as well as the Jewish community. In this study it was found that a majority of respondents value the Jewish curriculum but would like to see more non-Jews admitted. Archival documents also confirm that student retention would

improve with a larger and more diverse student body. KDS should consider marketing to a broader constituency that includes non-Jewish students. KDS should also consider offering parents more options regarding participating in more Judaics or more secular classes. Parents stay at KDS because of the current liberal arts curriculum, thus requests for more individualized instruction in math, foreign language, science, Judaics should be considered but should not overly disrupt the current course offerings.

Recommendation 3. An admissions officer should develop a recruitment plan that encompasses all grades. The admissions officer should have responsibility for both recruitment and retention and work with administration to develop a plan to address recruitment and retention at KDS. Beal and Noel (1979) found that student retention "is highest when a position is created to coordinate the retention effort" (p. 98). Walters and McCay (2005) also believed that the school had a significant role in reducing student attrition and that reducing attrition and improving retention should be part of the school's strategic plan.

This plan should include an emphasis on students and families touring the campus and attending school sponsored events. Data from school records indicates that 66% of families who toured the school also enrolled. Participant 1101 summarized as follows

I feel retention and recruitment needs to be looked at from a competitive point of view. How do we compare to our competitors? What do we do better than anyone else? For example, a couple of years ago the competitive advantage that KDS offered was an all day kindergarten while other schools only offered half day. Another advantage is small class size. I think we need to look at this issue again and see that we do best and emphasize those things.

Recommendation 4. Independent, faith-based schools must strive to make tuition affordable to meet the needs of middle class families. Affordability is an ongoing concern for many families (survey Respondents, 122, 17 and interview Participants 1010, 1103, 1120). Archival data shows an abundance of activities to raise money and make the school more affordable. These activities include a state sponsored tax credit for tuition at private school, yearly fundraiser for scholarship support, annual auctions, direct asking of donors, and other activities and events dedicated to tuition support. These activities should be continued. The tax credit will need to be improved if the school is going to remain affordable for middle class families.

Research supports the findings in this study that parents cite financial reasons and affordability as a significant issue in student retention (NAIS, n.d.; RAVSAK, n.d.). Sixty-nine percent of current parents and 50% of former parents rated the issue of financial aid as an extremely important factor in retention. School records indicate that 60% of families enrolled at KDS receive financial aid. Financial aid requests also confirm that a majority of KDS families are middle income earners. With competition from local tuition free charter schools, adequate financial aid is an important factor in attracting and retaining these students. Field notes indicate that parents want to be able to plan for tuition increases and have confidence that their individual financial aid award will be consistent.

Recommendation 5. Administration, teachers, parents, and students need to have a well-defined school discipline plan. This plan should be developed by a school discipline team, which would include school counselor, faculty, students, and parents. As a faith-based school, KDS wants to assist its pupils in becoming good people with

integrity. KDS looks at the teaching students how to live Jewish values as a fundamental part of curriculum. Improving student behavior and connecting students in an authentic way to faith-based values is part of the mission of the school, thus typically teachers and administrators will go beyond what would be considered reasonable in order to help students. To stay true to the mission of the school, it is recommended that students who are bullying should be given opportunities to improve their behavior. However, a policy should be put in place that clearly defines when a student's behavior warrants expulsion. If student behavior cannot be improved, the student should be counseled out of the school.

Recommendation 6. The admissions officer should develop a retention program specific to the needs and concerns of students and parents in fourth and fifth grades. At KDS the transitional year between lower and middle school is from the fourth to fifth grade. Archival data suggests that creating a retention program in fourth and fifth grades would significantly improve retention at KDS. Research supports the findings of this study that the logical year of transition represents a significant portion of attrition (NAIS, n.d.). Students typically make the decision to transfer from KDS to another school between fourth and fifth grades or between fifth and sixth grades. In four of the 5 years reported, class totals increase through fourth grade and then drop in fifth and sixth grade. Class enrollment in third and fourth grades are typically the largest and decrease in fifth and sixth grades. Based on the survey results, research, and interviews, KDS will be more successful in reducing attrition if the school begins its retention efforts in the transition year between lower and middle school. If KDS can be successful in

reconnecting middle school parents with the mission and culture of the school, retention will improve.

Stakeholders at KDS confirm that the school has been successful in communicating its culture to stakeholders and individual needs of its students in the lower school. Independent schools have the freedom to tailor the curriculum and educational perspective to fit the needs of the community it serves. Additionally, independent schools are more likely to take advantage of cultural bonds than public schools (Anderson et al., 1994).

As families look for institutional fit, culture of the organization and the student's ability to fit in is essential. Lindsey et al. (2003) believed that culture was also a factor in the success of the organization and looked at how a culture assesses itself. Beal and Noel (1979) as well as McKay and Walters (2005) found that an institution's ability to help students adapt to school culture was a significant factor in retention. KDS has the ability to transmit the advantages of the school and its curriculum in middle school. Based on the results of the survey, 83.5% of respondents believed that the school meets the perceptions that families had of the school when they enrolled. However, discussion with respondents suggests that the school has not focused these efforts on students who are transitioning to middle school. Survey respondents had difficulty listing any retention efforts made by the school; 50% of interviewees' could not identify any retention policies.

Recommendation 7. Administration should review the school wide communication policy. Fifty-three percent of the respondents stated getting information out to the community about their school sites' needs, mission, vision, and goals also

supports their efforts of engaging the community. An overwhelming 93% of the respondents interviewed expressed the view that communication is key to building and nurturing any type of collaborative partnership. Communication skills included having strong written and verbal communication skills, use of technology, and knowing and understanding one's needs. One of the most important skills for an administrator to develop is to learn what the community partner wants to get out of the partnership, to identify what their interest is, and then to be able to communicate how the school site would be a match for the goals that the community partners have (Respondent 3). Two issues that were listed by respondents was a lack of regularly scheduled email blasts and not repeating email blasts that will occur in the distant future. The website should be improved.

Recommendation 8. Independent, faith-based schools must continually improve their marketing strategies to meet demands of competition. Based on the survey results, research, and interviews, KDS will be more successful in reducing attrition by involving the school community in marketing the school to the broader community. All of the respondents made suggestions regarding marketing that might improve retention. These suggestions are listed in detail in Chapter 4. Parents should be recruited for marketing efforts. Responses show enthusiastic support for the school, such as Respondent 104 stating, "KDS far exceeded my expectations." This support could be directed toward word-of-mouth promotions.

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APPENDIX A

Head of School Permission Letter

TUCSON
HEBREW ACADEMY

February 22, 2012

IRB Board,

I Arthur Yavelberg give permission to Dan Ahlstrom to conduct his study entitled FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT RETENTION AT ONE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL IN THE SOUTHWEST on the campus of Tucson Hebrew Academy. This research study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Doctor of Education degree in Leadership and Policy in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, California. I understand that the research will include an online survey of current parents and interviews with board members and staff as well as the use of archival documents including exit interviews, demographic information and faculty, student, and board handbooks.

3888 EAST RIVER ROAD
TUCSON, ARIZONA 85718

520.529.3888 TEL
520.529.0646 FAX
WWW.THAAZ.ORG

POZEZ EDUCATIONAL CAMPUS

Respectfully,

Arthur Yavelberg
Head of School
Tucson Hebrew Academy

APPENDIX B

Parent and Stakeholders Survey

Survey was accessed from http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JTMP6VP

1. Tucson Hebrew Academy Community Survey

Participant Consent Form

* 1. I agree to the terms of the letter of consent

CLICK HERE

Agreement to terms

2. Please fill out the survey questions below.

As we look to improve the school it is important to receive feedback on areas which you feel are important.

1. Would you define the admission process as

◯ 1. selective   ◯ 2. non-selective

2. How many consecutive years have your children attended THA?

☐ one   ☐ four   ☐ seven

☐ two   ☐ five   ☐ eight

☐ three   ☐ six   ☐ nine

3. Below is a list of factors related to student retention.

Please mark the degree to which these factors are important to you in determining your choice to re-enroll.

1. Leadership

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Extremely Important
Board/Mission	○	○	○	○
Head/Principal	○	○	○	○
Teacher/Staff Relationships	○	○	○	○

2. School Culture

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Extremely Important
Social Connections/Friends	○	○	○	○
Meeting Individual Needs	○	○	○	○
Extracurricular Activities	○	○	○	○
After School Programs	○	○	○	○
Shabbat Lunch	○	○	○	○
Assemblies	○	○	○	○
Holiday Observance	○	○	○	○

3. Financial

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Extremely Important
Value	○	○	○	○
Financial Aid	○	○	○	○

4. Parent Satisfaction

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Extremely Important
Parent Input	○	○	○	○
Clear Communication	○	○	○	○
Safety	○	○	○	○

5. Curriculum

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Extremely Important
Secular	○	○	○	○
Judaics	○	○	○	○
Support/Enrichment Programs	○	○	○	○
Flexibility In Instructional Needs Of Students	○	○	○	○
Technology	○	○	○	○

6. What other factors (if any) were important in determining your decision to continue enrollment at THA?

7. Does THA meet the perceptions you had of the school when you enrolled?

○ 1. Yes

○ 2. No

8. How has your perception of THA changed (if at all) from when you determined to enroll your child and now that you have been enrolled?

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Parent Faculty and Board Interview Questions

Date_____   Time:_____   Location:_____

Name:_____   Code:_____

My name is Dan Ahlstrom. I am working on an approved research study at Pepperdine University under the direction of Dr. Diana B. Hiatt-Michael. This study is designed to gather data from stakeholders regarding policies and practices at [school name] regarding recruitment and retention of students.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project and taking time from your busy schedule. Before we begin the interview, I would like to reassure you that this interview is voluntary and will be confidential. I will record this interview to use as data for coding and analysis. The electronic audio file and transcripts will only be available to me. Do you mind if I record the interview? If there is anything you don't want me to record just let me know and I will turn off the recorder.

Excerpts from this interview may be part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report. Do you have any questions at this time?

Is it all right for me to turn on the recorder now?

1. What is your understanding of the student retention and recruitment policies at KDS?

2. What actions are you aware of that have been taken to improve student retention and recruitment?

3. What policy changes do you believe would make a positive impact on student retention and recruitment?

APPENDIX D

Field Notes and Archival Records

Date:

Name of Event:

Persons Present:

Notes

APPENDIX E

Survey Informed Consent Form

Thank you for participating in this survey. [School name] is collecting information from knowledgeable people like you to study the factors that affect retention at our school. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be anonymous. It is hoped that Information gathered from this survey will influence policy and retention practices at THA and improve the educational experience for our students.

Survey results will be used by the board of trustees and head of school. The head of school will also make results available to parents, staff, and other stakeholders as he deems appropriate.

Survey information is protected by SSL. SSL is short for *secure sockets layer*, and it is a protocol initially developed for transmitting private documents or information via the Internet. It essentially works through a cryptographic system that secures a connection between a client and a server. Many websites use this protocol to obtain confidential user information and it is supported in all modern browsers. If you have any questions regarding the information that I have provided above, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address and phone number provided below.

Dan Ahlstrom

[contact information]

APPENDIX F

Interview Participant's Informed Consent Form

My name is Dan Ahlstrom, a student in Education, Leadership, and Policy at Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology. I am currently in the process of recruiting individuals for my study entitled "Factors affecting student retention at one independent school in the southwest." This research study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Doctor of Education degree in Leadership and Policy in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, California.

The Professor supervising my work is Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael. The purpose of this mixed-methods case study *is to analyze the steps taken by The Board of Directors, administration, and other stakeholders to revitalize this school and increase enrollment and reduce attrition.*

I am inviting individuals like you who are knowledgeable of this school to participate in my study. Please understand that your participation in my study is strictly voluntary. The following is a description of what your participation in this study entails, the terms for participating in the study, and a discussion of your rights as a study participant. Please read this information carefully before deciding whether or not you wish to participate.

I do not foresee any potential risks that you should consider before deciding to participate in this study; however, in the event you do experience any risks, please inform me immediately, please note that individual interviews will be audio taped so that the researcher can study them in detail.

You will not be treated differently from anyone else participating in this study whether you agree to participate in the research study or not. Everything you tell the researcher is confidential and your real name will not appear anywhere in the study. The researcher will be the only person who will be able to identify who is in the study.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can decide whether or not you want to participate at any time. If you should decide to participate and find you are not interested in completing the individual interview, you have the right to discontinue at any point without being questioned about your decision. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the study you may leave or stop the interview.

There is a low risk of loss of privacy if you participate in this study. In order to minimize the risk, your confidentiality will be protected in a variety of ways; your real name will only be used on this form when you sign it and as a recording when we tape the interview; the administrative assistant will give a code number to each participant when you arrive at the interview your name will be changed when the researcher transcribes the interview; any transcription that anyone could use to identify you will be blacked transcription; the researcher is the only person who will have full access to the audio tapes of the interview and the transcriptions; The audio tapes and the interview transcription will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home; the audio tapes will be destroyed after the study is completed. When you speak during the interview you will only use you code number. You can stop at your own free will at any time.

The benefit to you for participation is the improvement of retention and quality of education at [school name].

If you have any questions regarding the information that I have provided above, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address and phone number provided below. If you have further questions or do not fell I have adequately addressed your concern, please contact the following persons:

Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael, Professor Emeritus and Chairperson of the dissertation committee for this study, at (310) 568-5600

Dr. Yoying Tsong, Chairperson of the Graduate and Professional IRB, Pepperdine University, at (310) 568-5600

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. If you agree to be a participant in my study, please sign below.

Sincerely,

Dan Ahlstrom

I, _____, agree to participate in this research study being conducted by Dan Ahlstrom under the direction of Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

I have explained and define in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent

_____   _____

 Dan Ahlstrom   Date

APPENDIX G

Interviewee Participant's Informed Consent Letter

Location and date: The individual interviews will take place by phone or at the [school name] in [city]. A school administrator will reserve a classroom or appropriate space for the individual interviews session. These interviews shall occur March of 2011.

Room set-up: The room shall be set up with 2 (or more) flip charts and 3 chairs facing the flip charts. Behind or near the flip charts will be a place to hang the completed participant responses to the questionnaire so that these can be reviewed as needed throughout the interview. One flip chart shall show all the interview questions so that participant(s) can follow the flow of the discussion. The other flip chart will be used to record individual responses to one question at a time. The current question will be listed at the top of each page. However, as many pages as necessary shall be used to record participants' responses.

Moderator and recorder: Dan Ahlstrom a doctoral candidate shall lead the interview dialogue. A trained interview facilitator will serve as recorder.

Procedures:

1. Dan Ahlstrom shall interact informally with individual interviewee as they enter the room. He will ask that they prepare and wear a nametag with only their first name.
2. The recorder will be responsible for distributing the nametags.
3. Dan Ahlstrom shall share the purpose of the forthcoming activities, and will verify that interviewees have signed Participant's Informed Consent From.
4. At this time of turning on the recorder, the assistance will state that he is turning the tape recorder and that any names that are spoken will not be in transcribed.
5. Dan Ahlstrom will begin the interview with warm-up question(s). The recorder/assistance will use as many flip chart pages as necessary to record responses.
6. Dan Ahlstrom will continue with the interview questions in a serial fashion. Responses will be posted on the wall after each question has been completed.

7. Dan Ahlstrom will solicit comments from participant regarding retention and recruitment. He will encourage interviewee(s) to note the amount of information that they have shared, how future retention and recruitment will benefit from the students, parents/community, and [school name], and thank them for their enthusiastic participation. The recorder/assistance will turn off the tape recorder.

8. After all interviews have been done, and interviewees have been dismissed, the assistance and Dan Ahlstrom shall organize the responses by question number. The responses and the audio recordings will remain in Dan Ahlstrom's possession for content analysis using doctoral students as coders.