Teacher Mentorship Program's Influence on Novice Teachers' Decision to Stay: A Case Study

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
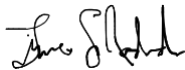
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

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Dedication

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows.

—James 1:17

I dedicate my dissertation work to several people. All were instrumental in this research journey from the onset. I would like to give them my gratitude for their part in this arduous adventure and for giving me the confidence and courage to see it through.

First, my husband, Andy, encouraged me when I proposed this crazy idea. He gave me the confidence and the courage to start and complete this work, never complaining about the long hours spent researching and writing. To him, I am forever grateful. Secondly, I'd like to thank my parents, Bob and Elaine. Combined, they helped in so many ways. Their pride in my work and confidence in my abilities were superseded only by Andy's. They were truly interested in my research, really listening when I spoke on the topic. Without their encouragement and enthusiasm, not to mention the monetary support, this journey would never have happened. Thirdly, I'd like to express thanks to my sons. Although this would not be a journey they would have taken, they understand my need for constant learning and growth. They know that is who I am and are proud of my work. They cannot wait to call me "Dr. Mom."

Lastly, and certainly just as important as the others on this list, is God. He lined events in my life up perfectly so that this journey, although not easy, was more manageable. He removed obstacles and distractions, opened doors to other adventures that seemed impossible to take on at the time, and eventually showed the benefits of timing and circumstance.

To God and all of these lovely people, my most sincere and loving thank-you.

Acknowledgments

The key to pursuing excellence is to embrace an organic, long-term learning process, and not to live in a shell of static, safe mediocrity. Usually, growth comes at the expense of previous comfort or safety.

—Josh Waitzkin

I would first like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Linnea Rademaker, who was at the same time supportive and challenging. She supported my need to be creative in this process but also challenged me to stretch my skills and go outside of what was comfortable to me. Your insightful feedback that I received pushed me to focus my thinking and bring my work beyond that which I thought I could attain.

I would also like to thank the other members of my dissertation committee, Drs. Amy Barrios and Karan Duwe, for the time and effort you have contributed to my work. Your help has been invaluable.

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Abstract

Public schools are faced with dealing with high teacher turnover and low job satisfaction indicators, particularly from novice teachers in their first 5 years of service. To combat the problem, schools have designed and developed a variety of mentorship programs aimed at providing support for the novice teachers and thereby increasing job satisfaction. The purpose of this qualitative case study program evaluation was to examine a specific school district's current mentorship program in order to determine how participation in the program influences new teachers' decision to leave the school district. Using the narratives from interviews and surveys, the researcher examined the differences in the teachers' individual perceptions of the mentorship program and its influence on teachers' decision to stay or leave. The narratives were coded to reveal themes in the individual groups and those that were common across the three groups surveyed. The results indicated three prevailing themes that contributed to the perceptions of the staff members who participated: relationships, scheduled time, and mentor/mentee matching practices.

Keywords: mentorship program, relationships, scheduled time, matching practices, mentor, mentee

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Vignette: Portrait of a First-Year Teacher

Andy Leslie (pseudonym), a third-year teacher at Central Independent School District (CISD; pseudonym) decided to start teaching at 34 years old (personal communication, December 20, 2019). He started in March 2017, stepping in after another teacher resigned. The district needed someone desperately, and he was the only reasonable prospect. I was the director for secondary English language arts curriculum and personnel, and as such I interviewed potential new hires. In his interview, I loved his enthusiasm and his knowledge of the content but was worried about his demeanor. He was serious and softly spoken, and I worried the seniors would be troublesome. But there were no other choices.

Andy was assigned two mentors: Lisa Fuller (pseudonym), a veteran English teacher, and me. Although it was unusual, the principal and I believed the difficult situation we placed him in warranted the extra attention. Throughout the remaining 3 months of the school year, Andy received observations, feedback, lesson design help, and opportunities to observe other master teachers. He believed the observations and planning helped him develop his skills "and work through issues he never thought would arise" (A. Leslie, personal communication, December 20, 2019). Classroom management was his biggest hurdle. He never "dreamed that high school seniors would be that difficult to handle" after a particularly hostile senior "became belligerent and used some very colorful language" (A. Leslie, personal communication, December 20, 2019). Despite some difficulties, his first foray into teaching was somewhat successful.

By August 2017, his confidence was higher. He felt he did not need the constant observations that "took away his authority in classroom and stifled his creativity" (A. Leslie, personal communication, December 20, 2019). When Lisa went to see him, he was less

cooperative and open to ideas than he had been previously. Soon their relationship deteriorated, they met less often, and meetings were less productive.

Unfortunately, the full force of the "first-year-teacher blues" (A. Leslie, personal communication, December 20, 2019) hit Andy by the end of October. He was not sure he would return after the Thanksgiving holiday break. When I met with him during that time, he blamed the students for their apathy and the parents for a lack of influence over their kids. Throughout the rest of the year, Andy continued to struggle.

I begin this study with a brief vignette into Andy's initial 18 months of teaching to, first, illustrate the level of commitment and enthusiasm with which he began his teaching dreams and, second, to show the struggles he faced through his first years of teaching. Even though a mentorship program designed to help him survive the struggles of learning his craft did exist at CISD, Andy encountered tremendous difficulties and considered leaving the field on more than one occasion—and still does.

Andy is not alone. Novice teachers across the country appear to struggle not only in the first year of teaching but also well into the next 5 years in the field (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The questions now become, are mentorship programs designed to help novice teachers adapt to their new jobs meaningful and authentic? How do relationships between the mentors and mentees influence the novices' teaching realities? What activities do the two parties engage in with each other and how do those experiences help the novice? Are the benefits of program participation exclusive to the mentee? What aspects of the program are influential in a teacher's decision to stay in or leave the teaching profession? The realities of the first years of teaching can be complex and wrought with unforeseen difficulties that could negatively influence the

novice's decision to remain in teaching. The question then is, does the program in place help novices more easily navigate the complex factors that influence their development as a teacher?

Framing the Inquiry

High teacher attrition has been reported to create issues for school districts across the states (Hammerness & Matsko, 2013; Parker, 2010). An attrition rate of nearly 50% of all novice teachers, like Andy, leave their teaching positions before entering their fifth year of teaching (Hanushek et al., 2016; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). In Texas in 2014, it was reported that 19% of novice teachers leave after their first year (Craig, 2014). A more recent report (Zelinski, 2019) claimed that 1 in 10 teachers quit after their first year and after 5 years, 3 in 10 of the remaining novice teachers had left teaching. Abundant research states that teachers leave their current positions primarily because of job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and lack of a comprehensive support structure (Ansley et al., 2019; Perrachione et al., 2008).

However, limited research explores the immediate and long-term effects of this constant turnover. One such issue is the constant efforts to fill open teaching positions left when teachers leave. Rural, low-income, and high-needs districts have difficulty attracting well-qualified, experienced teachers because of the remote locations, lower pay as compared to urban schools, and limited resources available to teachers (Beesley et al., 2010). Often districts have open teaching positions or must fill positions with novice teachers with little or no experience (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). This leads to another issue. The constant turnover forces school districts to continually train new teachers as the district works to replace the ones who leave. The costs to the district can be high. The rising costs of replacing teachers nationally has been reported to be $7 billion (Carr et al., 2017). Bobby Howard (pseudonym), a district administrator

at CISD estimated the local cost of the turnover to be $3,500 annually (personal communication, May 30, 2019),

Perhaps the most regrettable long-term effect of the high turnover is reduced student achievement. Research (Fletcher & Strong, 2009) has shown that students taught by inexperienced teachers have lower achievement levels than those taught by veteran and highly effective teachers. When students are exposed to ineffective teachers over a long period of time, the problem compounds, possibly leaving students behind in their educational development.

The high cost of replacing teachers and the extended effect on student learning have prompted states to require school districts to develop and implement teacher mentorship programs. Teacher mentorship programs are intended to help solve some of the issues created by the high turnover rate (Atkins, 2019) by providing novice teachers with a support structure while they learn effective teaching practices. Veteran teachers help guide and advise novices with on-time solutions to immediate problems by giving practical solutions (Carr et al., 2017) to real-life problems rather than theoretical and hypothetical situations. Easy access to a support person or group may help alleviate anxiety novice teachers may feel in stressful situations. Support with pedagogy, classroom management, and the inner workings of the district itself give the novice guidance from others who have more experience. Research has shown that districts with a comprehensive support structure for teachers retain more teachers regardless of the pay scale or location of the district (Chen, 2018).

However, not all districts have those types of programs or the same fidelity of services for the mentees. Varying degrees of support, inconsistencies in mentor/mentee matching, and level of commitment from administration all contribute to the degree of success of the mentorship program. Because these programs vary so greatly, a generalized analysis of

mentorship programs would not be helpful to every school district's specific programs so that they might improve or modify their existing program. Therefore, a case study of one district's program is necessary so that the findings are useful for future use to that district's program.

The Need for Support

Newly certified and employed teachers have been reported to leave their current assignments at a rate of 50% within the first 5 years of service (Hammerness & Matsko, 2013; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Parker, 2010). Researchers (Parker, 2010; Perrachione et al., 2008; Vagi & Pivovarova, 2017) attribute the phenomenon to lack of job satisfaction, support, working conditions, and school climate. For new teachers, the liminality between being a student with an abundance of support and resources and being a teacher with limited assistance and resources is difficult (Duggan et al., 2017; Parker, 2010). As a student, an abundance of resources and guidance is at the student's disposal to ensure success with studies. As a teacher just starting out, novice teachers may find themselves in a district with few resources and support to help them through the first few years of teaching. Some lose the enthusiasm for teaching that first drew them in to the profession soon after signing on.

In response to the high attrition rate, some states require school districts to implement mentorship into their new teacher induction programs (Goldrick, 2016). Mentorship programs help new teachers transition more easily into the classroom (Duggan et al., 2017; Hammerness & Matsko, 2013; Parker, 2010). Mentors provide much needed content knowledge and emotional support (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010) to novice teachers in the first year. While mentorship programs are required in some states, specific guidance has not been given to the districts regarding structure or implementation of the program (Hammerness & Matsko, 2013). Therefore, programs vary in their level of provided assistance (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010).

The most successful programs purposefully match the mentee with a mentor from the same content area to assist in lesson design and instructional delivery (Duggan et al., 2017; Parker, 2010). Ideally, the mentor is within the same building and in close proximity to the mentee to provide consistent feedback and frequent support (Duggan et al., 2017). Other mentorship programs have a larger support network that may include administrators (Vagi & Pivovarova, 2017), veteran teachers, and other novice teachers. These more holistic programs support the novice teachers academically, professionally, and emotionally (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). Researchers (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Duggan et al., 2017; Hammerness & Matsko, 2013; Parker, 2010) suggest these mentorship programs that use purposeful matching and large support networks have a significantly positive effect on novice teachers' job satisfaction and resilience, possibly leading to lower attrition rates.

According to two district administrators, the mentorship program at CISD while not totally ineffective in helping new teachers, lacks these two important elements and, therefore, appears to have little effect (M. Brock & K. Dubose, personal communication, May 30, 2019) on new teachers' decision to stay or leave. A thorough analysis of mentees' experiences within this specific mentorship program is needed to understand which aspects of the program are beneficial to new teachers and which aspects are not helpful and if the program has any influence on their decisions to stay or leave. Additionally, because of the lack of guidelines and requirements for these programs, it would also be beneficial to understand the decision-making process of administrators in designing the program, the implementation on individual campuses, and the criteria used to match mentors with mentees.

Mentorship Program in Study District

CISD designed and implemented its own unique mentorship program in 2013 (B. Howard, personal communication, May 30, 2019) to try and stem the flow of outgoing teachers and reduce the costs of replacing teachers every year. The program consists of the following components:

1. An orientation for new hires—3 days of training are provided on local policies and procedures.

2. Two-year mentee/mentor match—mentees are assigned a mentor for 2 years.

3. Mentor matching—the same subjects are taught in the same proximity to the mentee.

4. Common planning time—mentees and mentors are given the same conference periods when available.

5. Structured feedback—mentors are encouraged to observe and give feedback to mentees.

Unfortunately, the program seems to have had little effect on the new teachers' decision to stay in the district or leave (M. Brock & K. Dubose, personal communication, May 30, 2019). At CISD, teacher turnover rates reach 20% to 23% annually. State reports for the 2018–2019 school year showed that 32.7% of the district's 407 teachers had less than 5 years of experience (Texas Education Agency, 2019) and the teacher turnover rate was 22.3%. From these data, one may conclude that in the year reported, students had a good chance of being taught by one or more teachers with limited teaching experience. Table 1 shows the comparisons of total number of teachers, turnover rate, and years of experience as reported on the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPRs; Texas Education Agency, 2019) over a 6-year span. When comparing the number of teachers with less than 5 years of experience in a single year with the

teacher turnover rate the following year, when the percentage of novice teachers grew, the turnover rate also grew nearly every year.

Table 1

CISD Teacher Statistics Relevant to Teacher Turnover—6-Year Comparison

School year	2017–2018	2016–2017	2015–2016	2014–2015	2013–2014	2012–2013
Total number of teachers	407	405	393	395	373	378
Teacher turnover rate	22.3%	22.9%	18.4%	20.2%	24.5%	20.1%
Percentage of teachers with < 5 years of experience	32.7%	34.6%	32.3%	27.7%	18.9%	29.5%

Note: Adapted from *Texas Academic Performance Reports*, (https://tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/index.html). Copyright 2019 by Texas Education Agency.

Why Teachers Leave

Teachers—novices and veterans alike—leave a school district or teaching position for various reasons. One of the primary stressors for beginning teachers is the lack of collegial support (Taylor et al., 2019). When novice teachers are not able to form relationships with their peers, their professional and emotional support system is limited. That is especially true in rural districts like CISD. The remote geographic location makes connecting with others outside of the workplace difficult. Options for friendships are limited. Other stressors for teachers specific to rural districts are having to prepare for multiple subjects or grade levels and having classes with mostly struggling learnings (Smeaton & Waters, 2013). A practice in CISD's English department has been to put the new teacher with the lowest-performing students, even when the new teacher has no experience. The department chair feels that the teachers who had been there for a while have earned the right to have the easier students (L. Fuller, personal communication, December 20, 2019). This practice has led to many teachers' frustrations and discouragement. Not only do

they struggle with classroom management, often an issue for novices (Riley, 2019), but they also do not feel supported by their department chair. Such practices may contribute to the overall high turnover rate.

Some districts offer sign-on bonuses or longevity pay to encourage teachers to remain in their districts. One-time bonuses have been effective in reducing the number of teachers who leave (L. Feng & Sass, 2018), and pay-for-performance incentives have been shown to increase recruitment opportunities (Jones & Hartney, 2017). However, CISD is the highest-paying and largest school in the region. On the average, beginning teachers at CISD make $9,000 to $11,000 (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a) more a year than the same teachers would in the surrounding districts. Average for all teachers regardless of years of service shows similar differences. The higher pay for teachers locally may draw teachers to the district initially, but the high turnover rate indicates that it may not contribute to their staying.

Statement of the Problem

Public schools are faced with dealing with high teacher turnover and low job satisfaction indicators, particularly from novice teachers in their first 5 years of service (L. Feng & Sass, 2018). To combat the problem, schools have designed and developed a variety of mentorship programs aimed at providing support for the novice teachers and thereby increasing job satisfaction (Ansley et al., 2019; Gellert & Gonzalez, 2011; Polikoff et al., 2015). The goal of these programs is to lower the number of novice teachers who decide to leave the district, thereby reducing the rate of teacher attrition. Yet much of the dialogue in forming these programs has been to create a "linear process designed to yield specific results" (Zeek et al., 2001, p. 384) in student achievement and overall school success rather than examine the complex influences that effect teacher development. Thus, the needs of the individual teachers may be

missed. At CISD, the problem is that the mentorship program was developed to help novice teachers learn their craft and remain in the district, reducing the costs of teacher turnover and raising student achievement, but the attrition rate remains high. The program appears to have little effect on teachers' decisions to stay, as evidenced by an increasingly growing teacher turnover rate, 20%–23% annually, as reported to the State of Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study program evaluation was to examine CISD's current mentorship program in order to determine how participation in the program influences new teachers' decision to leave the school district. Using the narratives from interviews and surveys, I explored the differences in the teachers' use of self-assessment and how their individual perceptions of the program influenced teachers' decision to stay or leave. I also interviewed administrators who were instrumental in designing and implementing the CISD mentorship program originally.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do the current practices of the mentorship program align with the original design and intent of the program?

RQ2: How do the participants, mentees, mentors, and administrators perceive the program as being an effective strategy in reducing attrition?

RQ3: What are mentees' perceptions of the influence the mentorship program has on their decision to remain in the district?

RQ4: What are ways to improve the program to reduce teacher attrition rates?

Definition of Key Terms

Beginning or novice teacher. A novice teacher is one who has been teaching less than 7 years (Lassila et al., 2017).

Calling. A calling is a "transcendent summons … originating from beyond the self to approach a particular life role … deriving a sense of purpose of meaningfulness" (Neubert & Halbesleben, 2015, p. 861).

Full-release mentorship model. The full-release mentorship model allows for a teacher to serve as a full-time mentor without a teaching schedule (Fletcher & Strong, 2009).

Grow your own. It is a model of teacher preparation whereby districts recruit prospective teachers from the existing student population or the community (Barley, 2009).

Job design. Job design is an interrelated set of systems, process, and structures set in place to support work objectives (Ansley et al., 2019).

Mentor. A mentor teacher is an experienced teacher who assists, coaches, consults with, collaborates with, and guides new teachers (St. George & Robinson, 2011).

Professional learning communities. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are a group of schoolteachers and administrators gathering with the purpose of seeking and sharing learning and then acting upon that learning (DuFour et al., 1998).

Reflection. Reflection is the act of looking back objectively on one's own teaching and decisions (Duggan et al., 2017).

Self-regulation mentor model. The self-regulation mentorship model teaches one to set goals for oneself and monitor progression toward meeting those goals (Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012).

Shortages. Shortages in this context refer to the inability to staff vacancies at current wages with individuals qualified to teach in the fields needed (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Site-based mentorship model. The site-based mentorship model allows for a teacher to have a teaching schedule in addition to serving as a mentor (Fletcher & Strong, 2009).

Stand-alone induction model. A stand-alone induction provides generic support to new teachers, primarily at the onset of the school year, without other structures in place (Curry et al., 2016).

Support gap. The support gap is the gap between the support high-income schools are able to provide to novice teachers and the support low-income schools are able to provide novice teachers (Johnson et al., 2004).

Teacher mentorship program. A teacher mentorship program is a structure of supports for novice teachers provided by a school district (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Title I school. A Title I school receives supplemental federal funding to provide additional resources for the high concentration of high-poverty students who live within the district boundaries (Texas Education Agency, 2020c).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Teaching is complex. Numerous factors influence success or failure at any given time regardless of the years a teacher has been in the field. Student behavior, colleagues, leadership, lesson design, content knowledge, personal feelings, and more may either separately or collectively affect a teacher's work. Like Andy from the vignette in Chapter 1, many novice teachers struggle professionally and eventually have difficulty in finding meaning in their chosen craft. They lose who they thought they were, their identity shifting or becoming blurred (Anderson et al., 2014; Ó Gallchóir et al., 2018). They begin to wonder why they are teaching and what to do instead of teaching. According to research (L. X. Feng et al., 2019; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Riley, 2019; Zelinski, 2019), nearly 50% of all novice teachers leave within their first 5 years of teaching. The reasons they leave range from disillusionment (Darby et al., 2011; L. X. Feng et al., 2019; Vierstraete, 2005) to lack of self-efficacy (L. X. Feng et al., 2019; Flint et al., 2011; Rice, 2014), lack of support (Ansley et al., 2019; Rice, 2014; Taylor et al., 2019), and poor collegiality (Gellert & Gonzalez, 2011; Taylor et al., 2019), to name a few. These novice teachers leaving, a large number of teachers reaching retirement age (Duggan et al., 2017; Glazer, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016), and a growing student population (St. George & Robinson, 2011) all contribute to the teacher shortages that have been reported. However, novice teachers leaving the teaching profession so quickly after entering is a large contributing factor in high teacher turnover rates (L. X. Feng et al., 2019; Riley, 2019; Zelinski, 2019) like those at CISD, where Andy taught.

CISD works to reduce the teacher turnover rate by providing support for new teachers through its mentorship program. The purpose of this study was to determine if the mentorship program at CISD was influential in novice teachers' decisions to leave teaching or remain in the

district, thereby affecting teacher retention. The secondary purpose of this study was to identify which elements of the program as it was practiced were effective in reducing teacher attrition rates and those elements that may need to be adjusted.

Conducting the Literature Review

The approach I used to conduct the literature review began in a linear fashion but became more organic as the research presented other considerations. I began with working to understand the issues behind teacher shortages in public schools. The reasons why teachers leave the profession vary greatly, so I narrowed the research to the topic of why novice teachers leave prior to completing their fifth year in the profession. Using a combination of *teacher shortages, teacher attrition,* and *novice teacher attrition* with dates ranging from 2015 to 2019 entered into the Abilene Christian University (ACU) Margarett and Herman Brown Library databases, I was able to find a number of scholarly articles discussing these topics. Many of these were secondary sources that cited works by Ingersoll (2001, 2003a), who did extensive research in teacher attrition more than a decade before. Although these works contain outdated data, they provided me with a foundation upon which other studies are based and a point from which to compare more recent teacher attrition rates and issues to see if any changes had occurred.

During the process of researching teacher attrition, I found several sources that discussed the governmental mandates regarding mentorship programs in public schools. These program mandates were implemented to try to stem the flow of teachers leaving the profession, as described by Ingersoll (2001). I then transitioned into researching these programs using the terms *mentorship programs, teacher induction,* and *new teacher supports* in the ACU library databases using the same date range as above. The searches provided sources discussing many varieties of induction practices, mentorship program design, and administrative support for new teachers.

Because of the wide range of programs in practice, it became apparent that studying novice

teachers' experiences would yield more viable information for guiding mentorship programs

than would a study of a comprehensive view of mentorship programs.

The organic nature of my research led me to finding studies on administrative supports

and leadership practices that may influence teachers' decisions to stay. Stroh's (2015) book on

systems thinking provided insight into the mindset of the leadership of an organization and the

effects it can have on all members of the organization. This work helped me identify the factors

that may determine success or failure of any given program for individuals within that program.

The continuation of my literature search and review for more recent literature was needed

to identify current trends and practices in mentorship program design and implementation. This

research was further guided by university staff, peers, and mentors. I searched Google Scholar

and the ACU library databases for additional material including the terms *professional life cycle*

of teachers and *hope*. This largely organic approach revealed numerous resources that shaped

and grounded my research.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I examined the experiences of novice teachers and their mentors primarily

through the lens of complexity theory. Researchers (Horn, 2008; Rosenhead et al., 2019)

postulate that complexity theory describes the interaction of many individual parts that emerge

into one bounded system. The complex system, in its most efficient form, is self-sustaining and

contains fluid, often self-determining structures (Horn, 2008). However, the behavior of the

system cannot be predicted or anticipated by any single part; rather the system is a culmination

of the individual parts and the results of their interactions. Horn (2008) contended that enforcing

the model of a static system upon a complex system would be much like the cliché of forcing a

round peg into square hole. While some of the structures would squeeze through and remain intact, vital pieces of the system, the most fluid and adaptable portions, would be trimmed off. Mentorship programs are complex systems that must have the capacity to change and adapt to the needs of the individual members of the program as they change. Complexity theory was applicable to this study because few mentorship programs are alike from district to district because program design and practice should be based on the needs of the individual teachers within the program.

Horn (2008) further explained, "Complexity focuses on emergent behaviors that result from interactions within and among self-organizing and adaptive systems" (p. 132). That is, the system in this study, the mentorship program, may be ever evolving depending upon the needs of the individual agents—teachers—within the system, and those needs are altered due to the relationships and interactions between the agents. The discussion of complexity is appropriate for this study because of the unpredictability of humans as they interact and build relationships during their membership in CISD's mentorship program, which can have volatile influences on the system—the program. Complexity is also appropriate because of the transitions that the agents—in this study, the novice teachers—experience as they progress through phases of development of learning, understanding, and knowing (Horn, 2008). As the agents evolve and their needs change, an efficient and effective complex system and its structures would adjust to meet those altered needs. Horn (2008) suggested that a system's original intended design may transform and look quite different in practice due to the unique and often nebulous needs and levels of growth of the agents within the system.

While the State of Texas has provided some specific guidelines (Texas Education Agency, 2020b) to be discussed later, for schools in forming mentorship programs, the program

in practice in this study may look quite different than the original design and should be examined to determine if the deviations are compatible with the needs of the individual teachers as they change over time. In other words, is the district's mentorship program a complex system, changing as the teachers learn and grow?

Under the complexity theory, a mentorship program is also described as an interactive social system (Horn, 2008) that has the "capacity to … adapt and undergo transitions that lead to sustained … levels of effectiveness and efficiency" (p. 135). Not only are the structures of the system fluid, but their fluidity is influenced by the relationships and interactions of the agents. Growth and development are dependent upon feedback between the agents. Balanced feedback, both corrective and positive, is needed to sustain the desired growth. Horn (2008) also suggested that an overabundance of negative or corrective feedback often transforms the learning environment into one of stress and disillusionment for an agent. Too much negative emphasis on a predefined target—like student achievement in the education field, for instance—may contribute the agent's diminished sense of security, adversely affecting the agent's progress. By contrast, a balance of negative and positive feedback can create an environment of growth and self-reflection. The balanced system works to help the agent through difficult phases by both supporting and critiquing the agent, consistent with the intent of forming many mentorship programs like the one in this study.

The level and number of interactions (Horn, 2008) within the complex social system can also affect the agent's growth. Horn (2008) found that an absence of interactions between the agents in the system amounted to "zero growth" (p. 139). He also suggested that interactions without any guidelines may have produced limited growth but that the growth was not sustainable. The ideal situation to reach and sustain measurable growth was to conduct the

interactions between the agents of the system within predetermined parameters. The research concluded that the independence of the agent or individual was determined by "coherent structures" (p. 139) and a sense of community that is enriched by the interactions between the agents of the system. For purposes of this study, the sense of community and the structures must be examined to determine their effectiveness in building independence and a sense of competence for the individual novice.

A teacher mentorship program is one that affects instructional practices of teachers through mutual relationships built between the individuals in the relationship (Gallo, 2018; Steele, 2006). Atkins (2019) defined the mentoring relationship as one that is based on mutual trust and is focused on the increased capacity and development of the mentee to bring about a change. In this trust relationship, the mentor is a transitional figure who assists the mentee through various stages of maturation and development within the work. Ideally, the process of mentoring is one by which all involved individuals learn and grow by progressing through several stages of learning, understanding, and development. Not only does the mentee gain valuable knowledge and insight from the mentor, but the mentor learns new methods and perspectives that the mentee may bring to the relationship. In the following literature review, I introduce literature relevant to mentoring, including struggles faced by mentees and mentors, program design and implementation, and leadership influences.

Because every school district is a unique environment with its unique mentorship program designed to fit the needs of its teachers, it is important to conduct a case-by-case study within the CISD district to determine what factors are best for the teaching staff there. Each teacher has different interpretations of similar experiences under the wider umbrella of the school's mentorship program. Mitigating factors in decision-making for one teacher may not

hold any relevance for another. Thus, to understand how to best meet the needs of the teachers and keep them working in the district, giving their stories a voice is vital.

My research has been grounded in the history of public school teacher shortages and the variety of mentorship programs that have been developed to train and keep teachers in the profession. The emphasis of this study has been on novice teachers' relationships with mentor teachers, campus administration, teacher peers, and students and how those relationships influence the novices' decisions to remain teaching in the district, leave the district for another teaching position elsewhere, or leave the field of teaching entirely. Through an examination of an existing mentorship program and several of its participants, I affirmed the perspectives of novice teachers and their mentors and provided suggestions for mentorship programs. Overall, I revealed that the quality of relationships within the mentorship program has a significant influence upon the novice teachers' decisions to stay. Mentorship program design and implementation also have an influence on these decisions but to a lesser degree.

Conceptual Framework Discussion

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this study is based upon the complex factors that influence the perceptions of novice teachers in their new role as educators and lists factors that might be considered in a teacher mentorship program to help the novice navigate those factors. The discussion of the intent of a program's design and its purpose are worthy of investigation to determine if the CISD mentorship program meets its intended purpose in meeting the needs of the district's novice teachers or if it falls short of meeting those needs.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for the Current Case Study
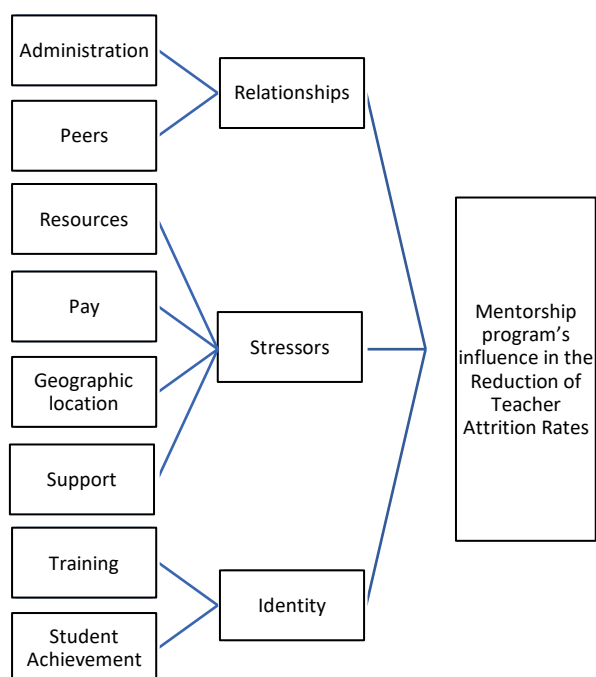
Fluidity of Needs

      The discussion here is focused on the mentee and their needs as they navigate through the first years of service. While I searched for an existing theoretical framework with which to approach my work, I was unable to find one that fully applied to the purpose of my research or would help with understanding the reasons for the perceptions and beliefs of the mentees as they interact with their mentors and campus administration. Dozens of researchers explained that novice teachers, especially in rural areas, leave the field of teaching because of lack of support, low pay, isolation, few resources, and lack of self-actualization. These are all descriptions of "needs" that are not being met. Thus, I concluded that Maslow's hierarchy of needs was where I must start the discussion. However, even Maslow's hierarchy did not seem to fit the work for this study.

Maslow's theory of motivation, often represented by popular publications (Mcleod, 2020) as a triangle (Figure 2), states that an individual has basic internal needs and is driven by an unconscious desire to fulfill them. The misunderstanding interpreted from the pyramid is that it is a five-stage model in which each need must be met in a specific stage or pattern of development before continuing up the pyramid to the next level or need (Mcleod, 2020). In other words, the lower levels, or deficiency needs, must be fulfilled before the next levels, growth needs, can be actualized. The colors of and definitive lines between the different categories of needs, as shown in Figure 2 and as commonly shown in literature, indicate that each need is independent.

Figure 2

Maslow's Hierarchal Pyramid in Traditionally Accepted View
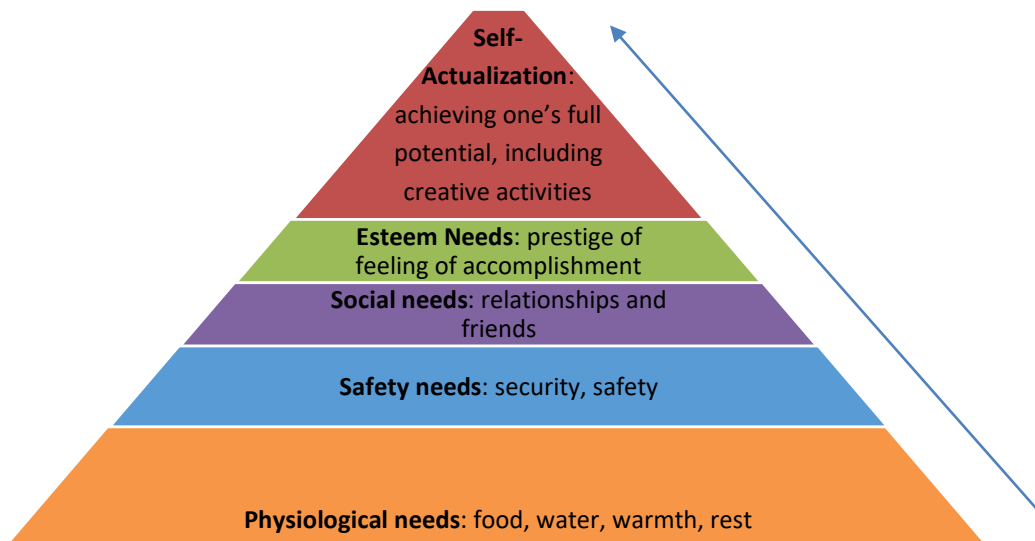
Bridgman et al. (2019) contended that this analysis of Maslow's theory of motivation is faulty. Their recent study of Maslow, his work, and interpretations of his work suggested that the theory was less about motivating people to reach the highest peak one step at a time and more about personal growth and fulfillment, knowing oneself, and reaching one's potential. The desire to have one's needs met at all levels occurs at all times and in any order. For example, when

searching for a new place to live, one rarely is just looking for a roof overhead and food to eat.

Other aspects such as community, social activities, and entertainment are often considered.

Rather than the unidirectional analysis, as shown in Figure 2, the model should instead be

represented as multidirectional, as shown in Figure 3, with movement in either direction

depending upon the basic need of the individual. In addition, rather than each need being an

independent category, the researchers contend that the needs are interdependent, with blurred

lines indicating movement along the pyramid in either direction.

Figure 3

Maslow's Pyramid in Multidirectional Representation
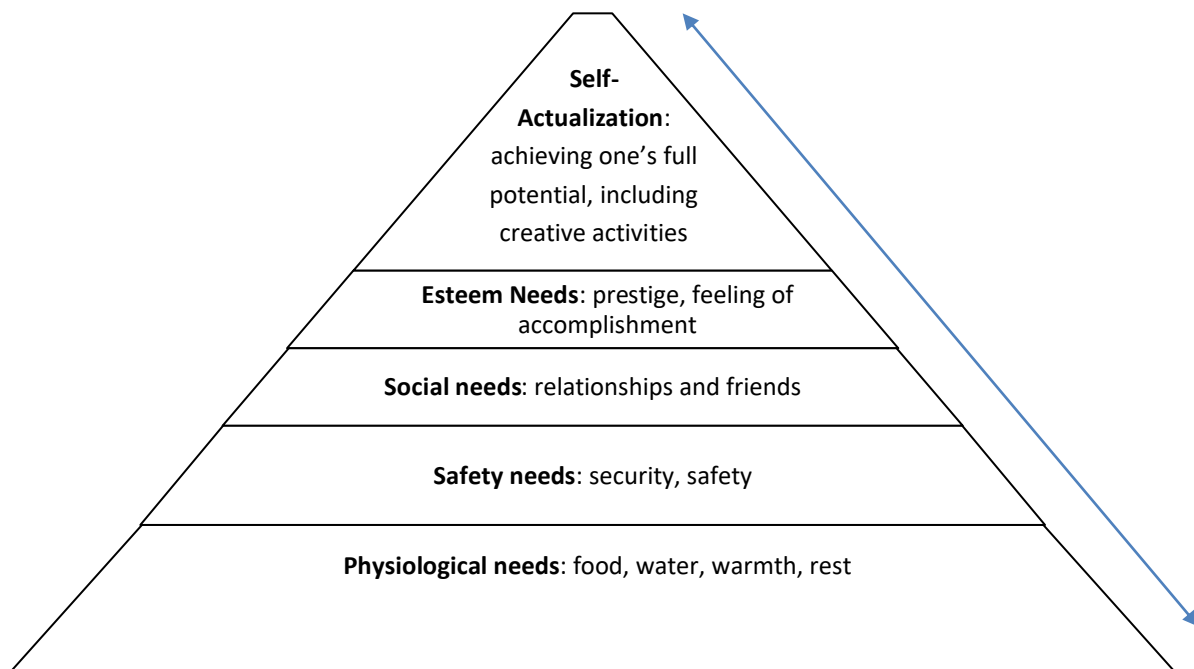
I, however, further contend that this model is faulty as well. When applying Maslow's

theory of needs to a mentorship program, the individual needs of the mentee must be met at the

time they are needed. Needs are spatial and ever-evolving rather than linear. This does not mean

that the organization meets those needs with a rigid system, first satisfying the need at the base

then systematically working progressively to the top until all needs are satisfied. If the theory is

used as a tool for mentees to achieve their own definition of self-actualization (Bridgman et al.,

2019) rather than a step-by-step process to motivate them, a different mentorship model can be

formed. Figure 4 shows the visual model of concentric, overlapping circles, each representing the

needs as Maslow defined them but none represented as more important than or as a prerequisite

to the others. This representation shows how the needs of the mentee are fluid and ever changing

based on any number of present factors listed in the conceptual framework that may influence

the perceptions of the novice.

Figure 4

Maslow's Hierarchy Reconsidered
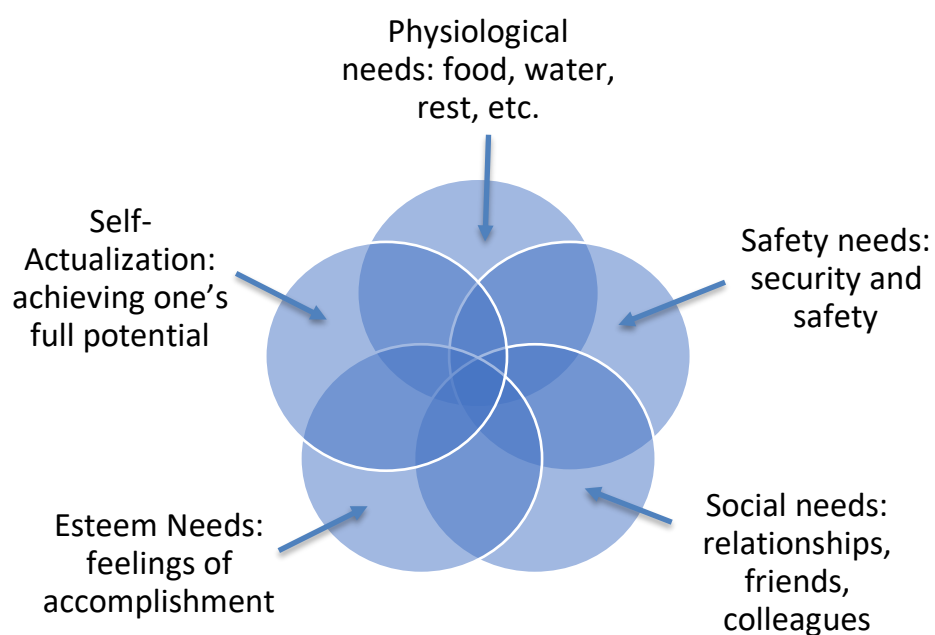
Instead of a rigid one-size-fits-all program, a more fluid program that meets the needs of

the mentee as they appear would make it possible for the mentee to pursue and satisfy the

individual and unique needs as they arise. One mentee may have gone through threat assessment

training or active shooter training provided by the district and may feel comfortable in the school

setting. But in the event of a direct threat to or compromising of the safety of the individual, the mentee is able to access the systems or procedures that have been provided by the organization so the mentee can satisfy the need for safety. Another mentee may put self-actualization before the basic needs of food. Neither mentee's needs are less important than those of the other, and yet the needs could occur at the same time in the same developmental stage of learning in the profession. A rigid, unyielding program in which all novices must follow certain steps and patterns would potentially leave at least one of the mentees without support at the time it was most needed. Instead, the organization provides a flexible structure within its mentorship program. The flexibility allows the mentee to satisfy their needs regardless of the position in the traditional interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy. This ability to resolve any immediate needs or issues may indicate greater job satisfaction and could lead to reduced attrition rates.

Perception Influencers

The factors that are discussed in this study may influence the needs of the mentee are organized into three categories; relationships, stressors, and identity and are representative of the perceptions of the mentees at any given time.

Relationships are often influential factors represented in the theory of self-actualization. Several studies (Ansley et al., 2019; Doney, 2013; Lassila et al., 2017) have shown the empathetic relationships with peers have been associated with "favorable outcome relevant to school climate, student behavior, and job commitment" (Ansley et al., 2019, p. 13). Mentees who experience these kinds of relationships were reported to have a better perception of the workplace. Mentorship programs that foster and focus on ensuring positive connections with peers have been shown to promote resiliency when novices are faced with adversity (Doney, 2013). The novice has a support system to which they can turn when something does not go

according to plan. In the current study, I examined the mentees' perceived relationships with colleagues and administrators as they were developed through the CISD mentorship program to determine if there were structures in place that focused on building positive, empathetic relationships and fostering growth for the mentee.

Novice teachers in districts geographically similar to CSID also have more concrete factors that add to their perceived stress levels. These rural low-income districts may have limited resources for their teachers and students. Those resources may be the number of personnel retained by the district or funds for special services, equipment, or training (Duggan et al., 2017). In rural districts, teachers with little experience are often assigned to teach multiple disciplines, especially in the secondary levels, because there are not enough students for one teacher to teach one topic. For example, an English teacher at the high school may have only enough students to fill two freshman English I courses. It would be fiscally irresponsible for the district to maintain a full salary for that one teacher. Instead, the teacher is given other courses similar to the first to fill the teacher's schedule and make good use of district resources. The teacher would likely then be assigned one or two other courses, such as sophomore English II and junior English III.

Some novices also are given administrative duties for clubs and extracurricular activities so that students are able to participate in as many activities as the school is able to sponsor. Students participate in any number of events from academic competitions in various topics to clubs and student government. With few teachers to supervise and provide guidance to students, the novice will often be asked to manage one activity or more. The school may also have limited funds for training its staff. Novice teachers may be struggling with classroom management or lesson development. When they are the only one teaching the course, the novices have few

resources for guidance. The rural district may not have the funds for bringing in a trainer or sending the teacher to attend the professional development needed. Not only do the teachers feel geographically isolated (Duggan et al., 2017), they also may begin to fell professionally isolated. In this study, I examined these factors as they are addressed by the district's mentorship program and if the factors influence the mentee's decision to remain in the district.

I hoped to find that the perceptions of the mentees regarding relationships, stressors, and identity were addressed by the structures of CISD's mentorship program so that the rate of teacher attrition might be reduced. In order to meet the needs of the mentee, as explained in this study through my interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy and the need to identify with themselves as a teacher, the program must be flexible to the perceived needs of the mentee.

Research (DeAngelis et al., 2013; Polikoff et al., 2015) suggested that a paradigm shift in the implementation of mentorship program design must occur for the program to have the desired effect of reducing teacher attrition. While a static "one-size-fits-all approach" (DeAngelis et al., 2013, p. 352) to mentoring design may be easier to implement, a more fluid model that meets the complex needs of individual teachers might be more influential in teacher retention. Teachers come to the profession with different experiences and unique ways of knowing that influence their perceptions, realities, and identities. They also progress in their profession at different levels and intervals. According to DeAngelis et al. (2013), a program designed with a "targeted and tailored approach based on the beginning teachers' needs" (p. 352) will foster resilience and promote longevity for the novice because the program focuses on the teacher rather than the structure of the program itself.

Mentorship Background

Teacher mentorship programs affect instructional practices of teachers through mutual relationships built between the individuals in the mentoring relationship (Gallo, 2018; Steele, 2006). Atkins (2019) defined the mentoring relationship as one that is based on mutual trust and is focused on the increased capacity and development of the mentee to bring about a change. In this trust relationship, the mentor is a transitional figure who assists the mentee through various stages of maturation and development within the work. Ideally, the process of mentoring is one by which all involved individuals learn and grow by progressing through several stages of learning, understanding, and development. Not only does the mentee gain valuable knowledge and insight from the mentor, but the mentor learns new methods and perspectives that the mentee may bring to the relationship. In the following literature review, I introduced literature relevant to mentoring that discusses factors including struggles faced by mentees and mentors, mentoring program design and implementation, and leadership influences on mentorship programs.

The Case Study

Because every school district is a unique environment with its unique mentorship program designed to fit the needs of its teachers, it is important to conduct a case-by-case study within one district to determine what factors are best for the teaching staff in that district. Each teacher has different interpretations of similar experiences under the wider umbrella of the school's mentorship program. Mitigating factors in decision-making for one teacher may not hold any relevance for another. Thus, to understand how to best meet the needs of the teachers and keep them working in the district, giving their stories a voice is vital.

Also, "measuring the core features of teachers' learning experiences" (Desimone, 2009, p. 181) could address the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Each teacher's learning

experience will be unique to that teacher. Therefore, a study of the individual and their experiences and perceptions of the program is just as important as studying the individual program, as both are complex and unique to the situation.

Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition is not a new topic but warrants being examined because it remains a costly problem for districts and students. Numerous studies indicated that the rate of attrition in public schools nationally has grown by 27% since the 1990s (Ingersoll et al., 2018a, p. 48). While the number of students continues to grow across the nation, the number of teachers leaving the field also continues to grow, creating a shortage of teachers. Recent research has shown that close to 90% of the shortage has been due to teachers leaving the field of teaching (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Less than one-third of the leaving teachers were reported to be at retirement age (Sutcher et al., 2016). This means that, nationally, a large percentage of teachers are leaving the profession at the beginning or middle of their career. Nearly 50% of novice teachers leave within their first 5 years of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2018a; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; St. George & Robinson, 2011; Tippens et al., 2013).

The alarming trend is mirrored in Texas. The total teacher turnover rate, including retirees and novice teachers, was reported as 16.5% in 2019 (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a). While this rate has remained fairly consistent since 2015, the crisis lies within the percentage. A recent study in Texas (Craig, 2014) showed that 19% of first-year teachers leave after their first year and 2% leave after their second year of teaching. The researcher also found that "47% of entry-level teachers … terminated their positions by their fourth year of employment" (Craig, 2014, p. 82). Another Texas study (Hanushek et al., 2016) also showed substantial movement within the state's school districts. The researchers found that 12% of first-year teachers leave the

profession and fewer than 70% remain in the same district in which they began their teaching careers. Like Craig (2014), Hanushek et al. (2016) also reported that around 19% of experienced teachers leave or move districts each year.

Because of the high costs associated with unchanging turnover rates, districts must find creative ways to retain the teachers they have. The federal government has offered some incentives to help low-income schools. The U.S. Department of Education has helped in offering student loan forgiveness to qualified teachers if they will commit to teaching in a Title I school for 5 years (Federal Student Aid, 2018). While that might be appealing to many fresh-out-of-college teachers, the district still has to find ways to retain the teachers who chose to take this federal aid. In spite of the loan forgiveness, novice teachers experience difficulties unique to isolated areas that may entice them to leave. Low salaries, limited resources, social and collegial isolation (Rooks, 2018), and multiple-subject teaching assignments (Barley, 2009; Rooks, 2018) are some of the challenges new teachers may find difficult to overcome, even if it means giving up the loan payoffs.

CISD's turnover rate is also troublesome. Within the district, the turnover rate has continued to climb. In the 2017–2018 school year, the teacher turnover rate was 22.3% (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a), significantly greater than the state's average of 16.5%. The number of teachers who have less than 5 years of experience has also consistently grown. In the 2017–2018 school year, 32.7% of the teachers serving CISD students were in their first 4 years of teaching (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a). If CISD's attrition rate for new teachers follows the same pattern as the national and state of Texas statistics, it can be expected that at some point the district will lose roughly half of these teachers. The additional concern, however, is that CISD's

attrition rate is 5.8 percentage points higher than the state rate. That has the potential to translate into an even greater loss of both veteran and novice teachers.

Student Achievement and Teacher Attrition

When school districts experience large turnover rates that lead to teacher shortages, the response can be detrimental to student achievement. As veteran teachers reach retirement age or choose to leave mid-career, school leaders are faced with tough choices. Rural district leaders may need to hire inexperienced or unqualified teachers, reduce class choices, and increase class sizes. Research (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) has shown that these drastic and sometimes unavoidable measures negatively impact student learning. Teacher quality, which has been reported to be the most influential factor in student achievement (Polikoff et al., 2015), has the potential to decline as the number of inexperienced teachers take the veteran teachers' place in the classroom. When researching the effects on learning when students attend class with experienced teachers as opposed to novice teachers, Rice (2014) reported a 54 percentage-point difference in student gains in achievement. Students who attend schools that are in the same position as CISD, with high turnover and a large amount of novice teachers, may be at a distinct educational disadvantage when compared to urban, higher-income districts. Rural districts often have difficulty attracting well-qualified, experienced teachers due to limited resources and location. Although CISD has not seen such a dramatic difference in achievement scores, there have been few gains, possibly connected to the high attrition rate.

For example, the English department at CISD has not seen significant gains in achievement in recent years. In 2018 and 2019, 69% of all students passed the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading exam (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a). That is the same percentage of passing students as occurred in 2015. The years in between (2016

and 2017) saw only 65% of students passing the reading assessment. While the cohort of students taking those assessments were different each year, the assessments themselves remained essentially the same. Leadership at CISD reported that the turnover for reading teachers at all grade levels has been historically higher than for other departments other than athletics (B. Howard, personal communication, May 30, 2019). Science and social studies saw similar results and had elevated turnover rates. Conversely, the math department has seen less turnover and higher student achievement. The scores on the math STAAR exams have been steadily increasing from 2015 at 68% passing to 2019 to 82% passing. The correlation between low turnover and higher achievement previously reported appears to be relevant in this example.

These high-stakes testing situations where accountability of student performance supersedes other needs of teachers and students have been reported to create environments and cultures that may lead to higher attrition rates (Duggan et al., 2017; Riley, 2019). In districts like CISD, where student achievement scores often barely reach satisfactory, teachers feel intense pressure from administration (Darby et al., 2011; Lassila et al., 2017; Sweeney & Fry, 2012) to increase the scores. District administrators push down initiatives, and campuses create before-school and after-school tutoring sessions and design interventions. Typically, the bulk of the work and responsibility for the success of these programs is felt by the teachers (Hancock & Scherff, 2010), leaving them stressed and drained and many times driving them to look for work in a less stressful environment, whether it be at another district or out of the teaching field completely.

A study of novice teachers and their mentors at CISD would determine the level of stress felt by teachers caused by the pressure of high-stakes testing and if the stress they feel has an influence on their choice to stay or leave. It may also reveal how much pressure leadership

places upon new teachers to raise student achievement and what the practices are that produce the stress.

Financial Loss to Districts and Teacher Attrition

A financial burden is also placed on districts as they work to replace teachers. Each year, districts conduct training days for their staff. New-to-the-district teachers—novices and experienced alike—must learn the current district's processes and policies. Staff to train the new teachers, supplies needed for the trainings, and facilities in which to conduct the trainings all cost the district money; as much as $3,500 to $20,000 per teacher has been reported (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Polikoff et al., 2015). When factoring in the costs of recruitment and ongoing professional development of new teachers, the costs continue to escalate as the attrition rates increase. Add to that the additional professional development that novice teachers require to obtain the skills needed to be effective teachers. In Texas, the reported cost of teacher attrition in the 2008–2009 study was over $214 million (Craig, 2014). The report also included the costs incurred nationally that resulted from teacher turnover as $2.2 billion in 2010. A more recent study (Carr et al., 2017) claimed that the costs of teacher movement had reached an estimated $7 billion annually to districts across the country.

While B. Howard, former administrator at CISD, did not have an estimate of what has been spent per teacher as a result of turnover, he agreed with the researchers that the reported amount of $3,500 or more per teacher seemed accurate. He explained that the costs could be higher if they had the monetary resources to fully support induction of new teachers. Rural and low-socioeconomic-status districts like CISD do not have the resources readily available to support these high costs caused by teacher turnover. Sending new and struggling teachers to the professional development sessions they need to improve their craft is costly both in monetary

terms and in the loss of time with students. The trainings are expensive, and while teachers are away from their classrooms, little learning occurs while an unqualified substitute monitors the students. Thus, opportunities for learning decrease with the amount of time teachers are away attending training.

Mentorship Program Development

In efforts to reduce the rate of attrition among novice teachers, many states, including Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2020a), require school districts to implement mentorship programs (Goldrick, 2016; Hanushek et al., 2016; Wilkins & Clift, 2007). According to the New Teacher Center Policy Report (Goldrick, 2016), 29 states required schools to provide a mentor support for new teachers, but few provided specific guidance. The Texas Education Agency (2020a) stated that the "purpose of the Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring (BTIM) program is to establish or enhance a … program designed to increase retention of beginning teachers" (TEC 21.458). The intent of these programs is to help new teachers successfully make the transition from learner to teacher by working with veteran teachers who have the knowledge and experience from which to learn and gain self-confidence (Atkins, 2019).

Novice teachers are often faced with a disconnect between theory learned in their teacher training programs prior to becoming at teacher and the reality faced upon entering the classroom (Koehler et al., 2013; Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012). Mentors provide support to the novice teachers in navigating the various stages of teaching reality, thereby bridging the gap between what has been learned and the practical application in the classroom. Guidance in instructional practices and classroom management strategies through modeling and observations provides valuable, tangible solutions for struggling teachers. In addition, feedback from mentor observations provides the mentee areas for growth and improvement. Veteran teachers also assist

with lesson and activity planning so that instruction content contains the components needed for student engagement and achievement. In addition to the mechanics of teaching, new teachers may need moral and emotional support. Having the mentor to express frustrations can help the mentee navigate not only the logistical ups and downs but also the emotional stress of the teaching profession (Atkins, 2019).

Mentorship programs can be difficult for mentors as well, especially with low-income, high-needs schools with few resources like CISD. These schools are seldom able to afford the luxury of giving the mentor teacher the extra time in the day to service the mentees they are charged with. Often it means aligning conference periods or after-school times to interact with the mentees. This takes away from the mentor's planning time, which is needed for working on their own lessons, grading, and other duties (Craig, 2014). Stipends for mentoring, if available, give little compensation for the lack of time needed to properly mentor teachers and be effective teachers themselves. Veteran teachers also want to grow in their profession (St. George & Robinson, 2011). Collaborating with a mentee may expose veteran teachers to new and different ideas, but the time spent with mentees takes away from desired professional development specific to the needs of the mentor.

State Supports

Even though many states require public schools to implement a mentorship program for new teachers, only 16 states provide the monetary support or program guidance to comply with the requirements (Goldrick, 2016). In other states including Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2020b), the school districts that need program support must apply for and receive grant funding (Wilkins & Clift, 2007). However, with thousands of schools competing for the same limited pot of money (Goldrick, 2016), there are no guarantees that money will be awarded.

In Texas, for the schools that apply for the Mentor Program Allotment (Texas Education Agency, 2020b), allocation of the funds is based on the needs of the schools with "priority points assigned based on [district] size, rural status, and percentage of … [the] student population that qualif[ies] as economically disadvantaged" (TEC 48.114, TEC 21.458). For schools like CISD, that is great news as the district qualifies in all of those areas. However, they must still complete the application for the allotment between April 20 and June 8. Also, the allotment is capped at $1,800 per novice teacher who participates in the school's mentoring program. With the costs for CISD estimated at $3,500 or more per teacher in replacement costs, the allotment does help, but the district still feels the heavy burden of costs related to high turnover.

The costs for building a successful mentor program manifest in other ways in addition to the budgetary measures. Experienced teachers who would potentially serve as mentors are often reluctant to accept one more thing on their plate unless time is given to them to meet the need successfully. Building sufficient time for the observations, collaborative meetings, and reflection practices that are needed for a successful mentor program (Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012) in the school day removes the veteran teacher from direct classroom instruction. Giving the mentors an extra conference time, and by default the mentee, means that students in the respective sections in a campus master schedule must be absorbed in other classes, either increasing the class size, increasing the student count for other teachers, or necessitating hiring a teacher for those classes—all of which need funding. When states do not supplement funding for mentorship programs, school district leaders must find alternative methods for funding them, often removing or reducing funding for other programs. One alternative option for Title I (low-income) schools is the ability to maximize federal funding by using Title I grant funds provided by the federal

government for teacher professional development (Beesley et al., 2010) to specifically target supports for novice teachers.

Administrative Support

Regardless of the funding amount, the success or failure of a mentorship program may depend on the strength of commitment to the program from leadership. Administrative support for mentorship programs was reported to be higher in high-income school districts than in low-income school districts (Johnson et al., 2004), partly because high-income districts had the resources to support the programs while low-income schools were less likely to have the resources to help novice teachers sufficiently. Administrators in low-income schools may struggle to match new teachers with like-subject veterans, provide initial job preparation training, or give the curriculum guidance necessary for lesson planning and instruction. Johnson et al. (2004) also determined that low-income school districts experience a 4.7% higher teacher turnover rate than their high-income counterparts. Additionally, their findings suggested the support gap that exists between teachers in low-income districts and high-income districts coincides with a student achievement gap.

However, low income does not automatically indicate a low support system for novice teachers. Dedicated leaders and staff with a culture rich in support and guidance through robust mentoring programs (Johnson et al., 2004) have created high-performing, low-income schools with low teacher turnover. Deliberate organizational structures and strategies provide novice teachers with a culture rich in information, appropriate curricula, and an abundance of mentor supports and guidance. Several researchers have indicated that successful mentorship programs, regardless of the economic status, have the following characteristics (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011;

Johnson et al., 2004; Koehler et al., 2013; Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012; Wilkins & Clift, 2007):

1. Mentors and mentees are deliberately paired by subject and/or grade level.

2. An organized and ongoing dialogue exists between the mentor and mentee throughout the year.

3. Mentors and mentees are in the same school.

4. Mentors are experienced with the appropriate skills and experience.

5. Mentors are committed to and take active roles in the program implementation.

6. Specific structures exist for frequent observations, collaboration, and reflection.

7. An environment of trust exists between the mentor and mentee.

An evaluation of CISD's mentoring program may reveal the gaps in the existing support structure that could be influencing the novice teachers' decisions.

Variations in Program Design

Even though most states provide little guidance for districts in designing and implementing a mentorship program, there are some states that have specific requirements for the programs. Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, and Hawaii require their school systems to provide support for new teachers over multiple years and an initial induction program (Goldrick, 2016). Texas code (*Texas Constitution and Statutes*, n.d.) states that schools "may" assign a qualified mentor teacher to teachers who have less than 2 years teaching experience in their current assignment. TEA also lists the requirements that a teacher must meet to be a mentor "to the greatest extent possible" (Texas Education Agency, 2020a). The ambiguous nature of the TEA code may leave room for a wide range of interpretations for mentorship program design and implementation by district leaders.

Other states like Texas do not mandate any specific requirements that would guide districts as they build their required mentorship programs. As there are few specific guidelines for districts to follow when designing and implementing their programs, several different models have evolved (Goldrick, 2016), each district designing a program model that would best fit the needs of its teachers and the resources available to the district. As a result, few mentorship programs are alike, each limited or enhanced by funding, personnel, and administrative support accessible to the district. Programs vary from district to district and are unique in design, implementation, and effectiveness.

For the purposes of this study, it is important that other existing program designs and their elements be examined. While the mentorship program in its entirety in an urban New York school may not be appropriate in a rural Texas school, some elements may serve as foundational structures that are applicable across a number of school environments. During the interviews with district leaders who were instrumental in the conception, design, and original implementation, I asked about the models they used to pattern the CISD program after. Some of the following programs were examined as they prepared the design they felt was best for the district.

The New York Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (NTP), a mentorship program developed in New York (Gellert & Gonzalez, 2011), was specifically designed to serve teachers with less than 1 year of experience. Grounded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which contends that learning is in response to observed behaviors, the design of the program and personal psychological factors "incorporates not only the reflection on the practice of teaching but also continual engagement in the collaborative practice where … participants can talk, work, generate ideas … in reflective

learning environments" (Gellert & Gonzalez, 2011, p. 7). The social interaction involves novice teachers in a community of learning with other more experienced teachers, removing the novice from isolation and enabling them to build upon the ideas of others while learning the craft. The research showed that even with program support structures in place, those teachers who collaborated and developed relationships with peers, rather than with mentors or administration, experienced more job satisfaction than those who did not interact with peers. Instead of the one-to-one mentor-to-mentee model, the NTP develops a whole community that the mentees are able to access for assistance and growth. Researchers Ingersoll and Strong (2011) corroborated the development of new teachers through learning communities like the NTP in which all members, including the novices, contribute to the learning of the whole group. The NTP's design of "frequent and prolonged [social] interaction" (Gellert & Gonzalez, 2011, p. 11) between mentors, mentees, and a larger community of staff members appeared to be successful in retaining teachers who not only participated in the NTP but also others who actively sought out peers beyond the supports of the program.

Professional Learning Communities

Districts that have implemented comprehensive and extensive mentorship programs with multiple layers of support are seeing significantly higher teacher retention rates than before implementation (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), "thus supporting the principle of totality of experience (Wilkins & Clift, 2007, p. 26). One such layer is the establishment of organized professional learning communities (PLCs) (DuFour, 2007). The PLC is a community of people with "shared understandings and common values" (p. 25) who engage in the "careful examination and constant probing of context and detail … through mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth" (pp. xi–xii). Members of the PLCs work as a whole to

accomplish what each cannot do alone. The PLCs provide structured time for novice teachers to communicate and learn with other teachers, enabling them "to learn more about instruction and instructional practices" (Wilkins & Clift, 2007, p. 26). A wide range of topics can be addressed in PLCs including instructional practices, data disaggregation, content, lesson design, and classroom management, to name a few. Mentees learn how to analyze assessment data and self-assess instructional effectiveness and lesson delivery to determine where the gaps exist in student understanding and growth. The PLCs help novices and other members to direct future instruction. In addition, in PLCs, teachers share concerns and strategies to help with the various struggles they all may be facing. Learning from each other in a large group setting allows novice teachers to see a variety of ways to work through challenges through "cross-role, cross-institutional collaboration" (Wilkins & Clift, 2007, p. 25).

While implementing PLCs can be highly effective in supporting all teachers, some issues may arise. One such issue is the nature of competition rather than collaboration (Wilkins & Clift, 2007). The researchers found that not all participants in the PLCs felt valued and that politics and hierarchies ruled the community rather than a full sense of collaboration. Individual interests sometimes overshadowed the good of the whole. Another difficulty, especially for low-income rural schools, is the lack of resources with which to form truly effective PLCs (Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Most teachers do not have time in their schedules to meet collaboratively with others and maintain their own work for their classes (Taylor et al., 2019). Meeting in PLC groups may seem like a luxury. One of the most difficult issues in forming truly productive PLCs is that they fail to be productive and effective (DuFour et al., 1998) in changing academic growth of students. Many intending to be valuable PLCs devolve into general meetings (DuFour, 2007) taking care of housekeeping or general conversation where little learning or growing is achieved.

The members of the PLC need to have a shared vision and purpose for learning and growing in the profession.

Self-Regulated Mentor Systems

Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey (2012) described a self-regulated model of teacher learning and mentor support as "a teacher's conscious goal-setting and proactive stance towards making a change in the classroom" (p. 154). Researchers (Carr et al., 2015, 2017; Gray et al., 2016) discussed self-regulation as a tool that novice teachers can use in practice to help develop their knowledge and strengthen their learning and capacity for teaching by assembling "a realistic, accurate assessment of him/herself with the goal of crafting an 'ideal self'" (Carr et al., 2017, p. 117). Self-regulation is a cyclical, inquiry-based process by which the novice teacher continually monitors, assesses, and adjusts classroom practices and then evaluates the results as compared to previously set goals (Taylor et al., 2019; Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012). The role of the mentor is to guide the novice teacher in understanding the results of classroom practices and to help find solutions for any adjustments that may be needed. Important in the development of self-regulatory skills and practices is the mentee's willingness to accept feedback, collegial relationship with the mentor, and an openness to differing perspectives. Without the ability to critically reflect on personal practices and accept suggestions for growth, there is no self-regulation.

The researchers (Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012) conducted a qualitative collective case study of 3 targeted participants. All were novice teachers who participated in self-regulation practices. Through 1 school year, the researchers followed a coaching model in which the novice teacher created lessons, received feedback, was observed, and had a postconference with the researcher. In this study, the base structures for all the participants were as follows: Each had

training in classroom management, lesson planning, and differentiation. Likewise, each

participant received the opportunity to form collegial relationships and received feedback based

on their individual needs. The researchers found that those teachers with "strong self-regulatory

capabilities demonstrated a stronger ability to plan and implement" (Tricarico & Yendol-

Hoppey, 2012, p. 156) any needed changes discovered during reflections.

      Carr et al. (2015) conducted a similar qualitative case study in which participants actively

engaged in self-mentoring practices to develop strategies "for capturing data to isolate his or her

particular challenge" (p. 9) through activities of self-awareness. While each participant found

their individual paths to reach their goals, each found value in self-mentoring practices. Through

the narratives of the individuals, the researchers' findings of the study indicated that self-

mentoring encouraged self-reflection and self-assessment, helping the participants realize their

individual strengths and areas of growth.

      Both studies (Carr et al., 2015; Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012) explained in this

section showed that the one outstanding factor in growing and learning that the researchers

revealed was that novice teachers who participated in self-reflection and were open to

constructive feedback gained greater confidence and independence in their teaching practices.

The participants who exhibited "strong self-regulatory capabilities" (Tricarico & Yendol-

Hoppey, 2012, p. 153) and were motivated to fully meet their individual challenges (Carr et al.,

2015) experienced greater feelings of job satisfaction and efficacy.

      While these studies do not make a correlation between self-mentoring and teacher

turnover rates, the suggestion of a positive effect can be inferred. A study of the mentoring

program at CISD worked to determine if it contains any elements of and practices relating to

self-awareness and self-assessment and discover through the participants' dialogue the effect that

any existing activities may have had on their choice to remain in the profession at the district or leave.

Stand-Alone Induction

A stand-alone induction is another strategy some districts use to support the novice teacher in the first years of teaching (Curry et al., 2016; Wilkins & Clift, 2007). A stand-alone induction program consists of prearranged, generic professional development sessions prior to the start of school meant to reach all teachers new to the district rather than the individual. This one-time novice-teacher induction practice consists of 1-day workshops intended to guide new teachers through district grading practices, common approaches to classroom management, and general teaching strategies. Presentations are predesigned to address the needs of most teachers new to the profession and are given en masse. The passive nature of receiving information implemented in these models has been shown to be rarely effective in the retention or effective use of the information received (Flint et al., 2011; Garet et al., 2001; West, 2019). Because there is little collaboration between participants and instructors and the duration of the presentation is usually relatively short, these one-shot models have little chance for lasting effect on improving teacher knowledge and skills. Critical structures needed for quality learning (West, 2019) within the short-lived sessions (Garet et al., 2001) are seldom present. Instead, activities designed to span a longer period of time, as in over the first 2 years—such as consistent collaboration between mentor and mentee with regular observations and feedback and multiple opportunities for learning and growth (West, 2019)—have proved to be more conducive to teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction than the stand-alone professional development sessions.

The draw for these one-time systems is that they are relatively inexpensive because a negligible amount of manpower and time is invested. Presentations can be recycled from year to

year, eliminating the need for development of new material. Researchers found that low-income

schools with limited funding, personnel, or support used these models most often to support their

novice teachers because of the low associated cost. Similar to Ingersoll's (2001) findings,

Johnson et al. (2004) contended schools that used the stand-alone model experienced higher

turnover rates, nearly 5% higher than schools that were able to supply more robust supports for

their new teachers. Low-income schools may be at a disadvantage as they may not have the

available monetary or personnel resources to train and support new teachers using more effective

and substantive methods. A study of the CISD mentorship program and its elements would

determine if the stand-alone models are utilized and how often they are utilized. The narratives

of the participants revealed the level of value each participant holds for these one-shot models.

Organized Support

Regardless of economic status, schools that deliberately organize and develop mentorship

programs with sufficient capacity for supporting their new teachers find higher teacher job

satisfaction and a reduced turnover rate (Johnson et al., 2004). Some common elements of

programs with an organized support structure are intentionally pairing with same-subject

mentors, common time to plan and collaborate (Curry et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2004), and the

opportunity for the novice to develop needed skills and an open, collaborative dialogue with

veteran teachers.

Fletcher and Strong (2009) examined two organized-support models: a full-release model

and a site-based model. The full-release model allowed for teachers to be full-time mentors with

no teaching schedule. These mentors did not teach students. Instead, they mentored as many as

10–12 teachers throughout the year and attended intensive mentoring professional development

sessions to increase their mentoring skills. Site-based-model mentors maintained a full or

shortened teaching schedule but mentored fewer teachers, just one or two, than in the full-released model. They also attended the same mentor trainings as did the full-time mentors. The researchers' findings suggested that the full-release model of mentoring had a more positive impact on teacher retention than did the site-based model because of the increased support and contact time spent with mentees. In addition, the study reported that larger gains in student achievement were associated with the full-release model when compared to the site-based model. However, as the full-release model requires substantial monetary funding in the form of dedicated mentors, many schools may not be able to fiscally support this model.

Summary

Researchers found that participation in the new teacher mentoring programs that included comprehensive supports from administration and other teachers led to improved teacher retention among novice teachers (Curry et al., 2016; Fletcher & Strong, 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Redding & Henry, 2018). A study designed to evaluate a specific mentorship program would be valuable to the district of focus. The wide variety and complexity of the mentorship programs make a holistic study of generalized mentorship programs ineffective and the findings not fully appropriate to any one program. If CISD's mentorship program is not evaluated qualitatively, the district will continue with an ineffective model or determine from simple numerical data that the program needs a complete change instead of an adjustment of just a few variables that may be ineffective. The qualitative approach to the study shows how the individual factors in the everyday lives of novice teachers and their mentors affected their decision to leave or remain in the district. Interviews and surveys revealed themes that were then analyzed to determine the level of influence they may have had on novice teachers.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study program evaluation is to examine CISD's current mentorship program in order to determine how participation in the program influences new teachers' decision to leave the school district. Using the narratives from interviews and surveys, I explored the differences in the teachers' use of self-assessment and how their individual perceptions of the program influenced teachers' decision to stay or leave. I surveyed administrators who were instrumental in designing and implementing the CISD mentorship program originally, mentors who participated and worked with mentees, and mentees whom the program was designed to help.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do the current practices of the mentorship program align with the original design and intent of the program?

RQ2: How do the participants, mentees, mentors, and administrators perceive the program as being an effective strategy in reducing attrition?

RQ3: What are mentees' perceptions of the influence the mentorship program has on their decision to remain in the district?

RQ4: What are ways to improve the program to reduce teacher attrition rates?

The issue of high teacher attrition rates across the United States has been well documented over the past two decades. With baby boomer teachers reaching retirement age (Sutcher et al., 2016), teachers choosing early retirement (Tippens et al., 2013), and the growing population of students (St. George & Robinson, 2011), the expanded need for well-qualified teachers seems apparent. As approximately 50% of all novice teachers resign their positions

within 5 years of service (Hanushek et al., 2016; Ingersoll et al., 2018b; Tippens et al., 2013), the teacher shortage becomes magnified (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Researchers (Barley, 2009; Cowen et al., 2012; Duggan et al., 2017; Rooks, 2018) have also documented that rural and low-income districts suffer even higher teacher attrition rates than do their wealthier suburban counterparts. CISD, a rural low-socioeconomic-status school district, is no exception. The district's average teacher attrition rates continually exceed those of the state of Texas by 5.8% (Texas Education Agency, n.d.b). The district struggles yearly to retain and recruit well-qualified teachers every year.

Following federal mandates (Goldrick, 2016), CISD created a teacher mentorship program to help battle the high teacher turnover they experience every year. With few specific guidelines, leaders at CISD, as in many other districts across the United States, designed the model that they felt fit the district and its teachers best. My goal in conducting this qualitative, case study of CISD's mentorship program and some of its embedded participants is to determine if the program as it is practiced helps to influence the novice teachers' decisions to remain in the district.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process I followed to conduct the case study research to determine if CISD's novice teachers' decisions to stay in the district are influenced by the practices of the mentorship program. Sections included in this chapter describe the design and method of the study, the setting and population on which the study is focused, the credibility and trustworthiness of my work, any limitations of my research, the various roles I assumed during the process, the data collection and analysis procedures used, and the ethical considerations I addressed to ensure the safety and well-being of my participants.

Research Design and Methodology

The research presented is a qualitative case study program evaluation of the mentorship program at CISD, a rural public school district in Texas. Because mentorship program design varies from state to state and even school to school, the only way to determine the value of a program design and implementation is to study the unique characteristics (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2012) of the individual "bounded entity" (Stake, 2010, p. 6) or integrated system with set parameters and boundaries. Other factors besides the originally designed structure of a mentorship program also contribute to the influence the program has on teacher retention. Individuals involved in the program include mentees whom the program is meant to help, mentors who are the vessel through which the mentees are to learn and grow, and administrators who design and implement the program. The individual participants' experiences were embedded case studies within the larger holistic case study (Yin, 2012). The larger case, CISD's mentorship program, serves as the study's primary "unit of analysis" (Yin, 2012, p. 6). Using the embedded case-study design allowed me to gather and include data about the activities and perceptions of the individuals who operate within the holistic unit. An analysis of the embedded cases showed how interpersonal actions and individual perceptions contribute to the mentorship program's success or failure in practice in addition to the designed instruction.

The qualitative study is grounded in the complexity theory (Langdon & Alansari, 2012; Rosenhead et al., 2019). Complexity theory, as used in this study, refers to a "complex adaptive system … where the agents learn and adapt" (Rosenhead et al., 2019, p. 2) as they interact with other agents within the system. The system is CISD's mentorship program, and the participants are the agents who act and react within the system based on the actions and reactions of other agents.

The qualitative elements of the study in the form of interviews and surveys were the primary method for collecting data. The data collected represented the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the participants as they told their stories of their experiences. The data collected from interviews and surveys from three groups of participants of administrators, mentors, and mentees were then coded and triangulated to reveal themes both unique to each group and common across all groups.

Boundaries of the Case

The case studied was the mentorship program within the larger organization, CISD. The mentorship program was the system of operation that was created by CISD leaders to stem the flow of new teachers leaving the district. The district as a whole was not be evaluated, nor were its employees. Only the mentorship program was evaluated. I sought to understand the operations of the program as they were intended and as they were in practice to discern if the program operations had an influence on teachers' decisions to stay in the district, leave the district for another district, or leave the teaching profession. The components of the program studied included mentor/mentee matching, professional development opportunities, self-reflection activities, time allotted for working with mentors/mentees, and relationship building activities. Individuals who agreed to participate in the study were embedded case studies within the larger holistic case. Each of these embedded cases were studied only in reference to the holistic case, not to any other system that operates under the CISD umbrella. Informed consent forms were delivered electronically in November 2020. Surveys were sent immediately following the receipt of the signed consent forms from the willing participants. Shortly thereafter, arrangements were made to conduct Zoom interviews with those who agreed to an interview.

Population/Setting

The study was conducted primarily with staff from all public school campuses within the district studied. I chose CISD because the teacher attrition rate is consistently higher than the state attrition rate. CISD's attrition rate averaged 22.3% (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a) over the last 5 years, whereas the state attrition rates averaged 16.5% (Texas Education Agency, n.d.b) over the same time span. Other considerations in choosing CISD were its rural location, its high minority student population, and its high low-socioeconomic-status (SES) population. The district receives Title I funding from the U.S. Department of Education because more than 40% of the students who attend CISD come from low-income households (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Studies (Ingersoll et al., 2004, 2018b; Maranto & Shuls, 2012) have consistently indicated that rural low-income school districts like CISD experience some of the highest teacher turnover rates.

Because of its economic status and rural geographic location, CISD is particularly challenged in recruiting, hiring, and retaining highly qualified teachers (Maranto & Shuls, 2012; Rooks, 2018). Teachers who have the opportunity to live anywhere often desire to teach in more urban settings that have many more commercial amenities (Rooks, 2018) and opportunities for social activities. The geographic and social isolation (Cowen et al., 2012), lower teaching salaries, and limited resources that are inherent in rural low-income communities may not be as attractive to most new teachers as urban life would be. Leaders in some of these high-needs schools find that they have to hire whoever walks in the door (Maranto & Shuls, 2012) because there are few choices to fill vacant positions, thus leaving schools with teachers who may not be highly qualified or are of low quality.

As a rural low-income district that finds recruiting and retaining teachers difficult, CISD must find innovative ways to keep the teachers that do choose to work there. Even though the school employs over 400 teachers and has over 6,000 students (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a), its resources are limited due to the low-socioeconomic-status nature of the community. Of the 6,000 students attending CISD, 77.9% received free or reduced-price lunches and free breakfasts, compared to the 60.6% percent of low-socioeconomic-status students across the state of Texas.

Population

When choosing the participants for my study, I employed purposive sampling (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). My intent was to invite enough participants to include as much demographic diversity as possible, but my selection was purposeful. Teachers from different ethnic and economic backgrounds and of different ages and genders were invited. Participants chosen must have had either current or previous experience with the mentorship program at CISD at some level. I invited 378 staff members, including mentors, mentees, and administrators, to take part in this study, all of whom must have had some measure of experience with the district's mentorship program. The teachers, both novice and experienced, must have taught in the disciplines of English, math, social studies, science, or an elective course. Teachers from the four core subjects were important to the study because researchers (Ingersoll, 2003b; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) have reported that teachers in these fields experience larger workloads and more stress due to state standardized testing requirements. The perspectives from elective teachers were also vital as their experiences are not as common and their needs are highly individualized because of the limited number of other teachers in their field who are available to work with.

Invitations to participate were delivered via email to all 378 staff members. The primary goal of this study was to understand if CISD's mentorship program influenced novice teachers'

decision to remain teaching in the district. For that reason, most of the novice participants must have been teaching for 5 or fewer years and must have been or currently be mentees in the program.

As the researcher, I worked to understand the perspectives of both the mentee and the mentor in similar situations. Therefore, after collecting the names of those mentees who were willing to participate, teachers who had been mentors to the mentees were asked to participate. These invitations were delivered via email as well. I also invited administrators from CISD's high school and junior high campuses. Participation from these groups was important to bring understanding of the campus-specific issues and challenges that may exist and may affect the actual implementation of the mentorship program. I also invited district administrators who took part in the original inception and design of the district's mentorship program. The information gathered from these participants helped me understand the intent and goals of creating the program. Invitations were also emailed to these individuals.

Sample

The number of participants in the sample size contained 14 administrators, 25 mentees, and 36 mentors from a combination of all district campuses. The first step in gathering the full sample size was to collect email addresses and names of teachers who had 5 years or fewer in the teaching field and were currently or had in the past taken part as mentees in the district's program. I then collected a list of teachers who had acted as mentors within the program and administrators who have had program duties. The next group solicited consisted of those who had left the district. These lists were provided by the district's human resources department, the district web pages, and campus administrators. After collecting email addresses, I sent emails recruiting people to take part in my study. Those who chose to participate were offered a small

compensation for their time, a $10 gift card to Sonic or Chick-fil-A, businesses within the community. Upon receiving acceptances from the original lists, I then determined that my sample size was sufficient to conduct this research.

Subjects who agreed to participate were sent an informed consent document fully explaining any risks they would be taking and outlining the purpose of the study and the importance of their contribution. They were also assured that their time was valuable and that I would adhere to a 30-to-45-minute interview if they chose to participate in that manner. Options given to participants for the interview included a Zoom interview with or without the camera option, phone interview, or emailing the questions to them so they could answer on their own time. Most participants only completed the survey relevant to their role in the district's mentorship program. One teacher agreed to a phone interview during the course of the study.

Materials/Instruments

The research was conducted in two parts. The first part consisted of highly structured surveys with a combination of open-ended questions and Likert-style questions that were intended to gather specific perceptions of similar topics across all participant groups (Yin, 2012). Even though all recipients in each role they served within the mentorship program received similar questions, the answers provided were as individual as the participant. This practice helped to eliminate variances in unintended discussion topics at the onset of the study and helped collect and classify perceptions and knowledge of the program from all participants. The questions were designed so that the participants focused on their perceptions and understanding of the program as it exists rather than on any existing personal agendas. Each participant group received the questions listed in Appendix A: Administrator Survey, Appendix B: Mentor Survey, and Appendix C: Mentee Survey.

The second part of the study consisted of interviews conducted via Pro Zoom with the participants who agreed to an interview. One participant agreed to be interviewed. The 30-minute interview had an open structure designed to elicit the "description of an episode, a linkage, [or] an explanation" (Stake, 2010, p. 65) that was unique to the individual being interviewed. The less structured format revealed the constructed realities that the participant had of experienced situations (Yin, 2012). The information from the interview revealed how the participant thought about situations like RQ2, which asked how they perceived the effectiveness of the mentorship program. I posed the descriptive questions (Appendix D) to gain greater insight into their perspectives and interpretations of experiences within the mentorship program. These questions allowed for and narratives were guided by the individuals' responses to the original survey and provided "rich descriptions or … insightful explanations" (Yin, 2012, p. 5) of the participants' realities. The interview was recorded with the consent of the participant for later transcription.

Data Collection

Data were collected in two phases. The first phase was the distribution of surveys via Google Forms. The second phase was the individual interview conducted via Zoom. Questions in both phases were designed to answer how participation in CISD's mentorship program influences novice teachers' decision to stay or leave the district. Even though the novice teacher group was the target group, the perceptions and realities of members of other groups played integral roles in the perceptions and realities of the target group. Therefore, their view of the program and their role supplied valuable insight into why the program had or did not have influence on the novice teacher.

The participants from whom I gathered data were categorized into three different groups. The first group was the "administrators" of the mentorship program. This group consisted of elite participants (Yin, 2012) from the district level and campus administrators who took part in the conception and design of CISD's mentorship program and were responsible for its implementation. The second group of participants were the "mentors." These individuals were assigned one or more novice teachers to help them with the first 2 years in CISD. The third and final group of participants in the study were the "mentees." Individuals included in this group were all novice teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience.

The three groups represented different levels of participation and different roles in the district's mentorship program. The distinctions between the categories were important to the study because the perceptions of the participants may have been unique to each of the groups. During the survey phase, each of the participants received similar questions (see Appendixes A–C), which were created evaluate the perceptions of the participants on the goals and importance of the district's mentorship program and their experiences within the program. I then triangulated the data from each of the three groups to reveal themes that may be inherent within the groups or that might cross the groups' boundaries of experiences.

Within the surveys, each group was asked different questions, but each person within the group was asked the same questions (see Appendixes A–C). The "administrators" of the program were asked questions focused on the intended goals of the program. They were asked about guidelines received to help them form their program and from whom they received them. They were also questioned if they believed that forming the mentorship program was important to CISD and what was done to maintain and support the program. Other questions focused on the logistics of implementing and maintaining the program and the resources available for sustaining

the program as it was designed from the district, major obstacles, and logistical considerations. They were then asked to respond to the value of relationships as they had observed within the program in practice and some concerns they may have had for all novice teachers and their development (see Appendix A).

Mentors were asked questions similar to those posed to the "administrators" with the addition of specific questions (see Appendix B) related to their mentees. This group's questions focused on their duties as a mentor within the program, the types of duties, and their feelings about those duties. Other questions discussed the nature of their expertise and how it relates to their mentee and mentee success. They were also asked to discuss personal experiences with mentees and the relationships they have had with them.

Mentees were the target group of the research study. The interview questions (see Appendix D) posed to this group focused on the relationships they had with other teachers, including their mentors, and administrators. Questions covered topics including the amount of time they spent with their mentors and the content subject they had been hired to teach by the district.

I then conducted the interview of the participant who agreed to take part. Following the interview, I transcribed the recording and gave the participant the opportunity to review the rough drafts of the transcripts. This form of member checking (Stake, 2010) allowed the individual to give feedback for "accuracy and palatability" (p. 115). I revised some portions of the transcript based on this feedback. Stake (2010) posed that participants may not often respond to the drafts, but value is added to the reports when member checking was practiced.

Analysis Procedures

The interview recording and survey responses were transcribed and analyzed for relevant text (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) directly related to the research questions. Pulling out the salient pieces of the narrative of the vast amounts of verbiage condensed the data into patterns (Yin, 2012) across the participant groups. Coding these patterns revealed common perceptions that support contextual conditions within the program, thereby revealing prevailing truths in practices. Precoding in this way formatted the data into more manageable categories (Stake, 2010) so that they could be tallied for number of occurrences throughout the study. Categories were assigned a number that was related to the research question that particular item addressed. Coding was appropriate for qualitative analysis because it highlights specific verbiage that the participant stresses. Analyzing the participants' narrative in this manner revealed underlying feelings, emotions, and perceptions. I then used descriptive coding to summarize the stanzas into a single word or short phrase.

After transcribing and coding the individual narratives, I combined the coded transcripts from all interviews into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I sorted the codes with the corresponding stanzas alphabetically. Triangulating the data from all three groups helped me see dominant patterns or themes and from which individuals or groups of individuals the themes emerged. The next step was to examine the codes to look for patterns of identical or related codes. I sorted comparative codes into categories (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2012). The categories then were divided a step further into subcategories. Following the categorical sorting, I analyzed and reorganized each category and its subcategories into a logical storyline or analytical framework that addressed the research questions.

The triangulation of the data from all three groups—administrators, mentors, and mentees—revealed commonalities in perceptions and interpretations of CISD's mentorship program in practice and helped to reveal important factors and contributors to the district's high attrition rate and teachers' decision to leave the district. By analyzing the codes relevant to the themes rather than by groups of people, patterns emerged of the participants' reality of experiences within the mentorship program in practice that, in some cases, transcended their groups' boundaries. The triangulation of the perceptions and experiences from a wide group of people (Shenton, 2004) represented by the three groups provided a rich description of the conditions within the case study.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The premise of this case study was conceived several years ago through my personal experiences and through working with mentees and other mentors. My personal experiences as a novice teacher were fraught with stress, uncertainty, and many mistakes. I often wonder if I would have been a better teacher and mentor if I had had a role model or mentor to guide me through those first rough years. The realization that mentors and mentees are all different and have unique perspectives, ways of communication and interpreting, and individual histories they bring to their vocation was not difficult to ascertain. Even before beginning the first formulation of the study, I worked with teachers to develop better relationships with them to form bonds on social and professional levels. Through professional learning communities (PLCs), we worked through issues and overcame insurmountable roadblocks. Throughout this time, I marveled at the way some novice teachers flourished while others grew bitter and resentful. I wanted to know, what was the seemingly magic combination of mentor and mentee that made the difference between success and failure. I wanted to know why some school districts managed to keep their

teachers while others experienced high turnover, all the while feeling like there was a connection between relationships formed and job satisfaction. My familiar association with the participants and practical working knowledge of the district on both the teaching level and the administrative level lent to the credibility of my study.

As a researcher in a qualitative study, I established the trustworthiness, or credibility, of my work. Throughout the process of gathering data, I kept a journal of field notes and made a practice of self-reporting (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) regardless of the outcomes. For this study, I did not have a specific agenda in mind, nor did I work to prove any theory I made prematurely. The goal of the study was to listen to the teachers, understand their perspectives, and compare them to the perspectives of other players in the study. At the beginning of the study, I reconnected with the individual participants who had accepted the invitation to take part in the study. Arrangements were attempted for preinterview meetings, the interviews, and postinterview meetings where appropriate. During the postinterview meeting with the 1 participant who participated in the interview stage of the study, the participant had the opportunity to review the part of the transcripts that were relevant to him. Member checking (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Shenton, 2004) in this way allowed for the participants to review the transcripts for accuracy and to clarify any uncertainties or ambiguities. As there were no other interviewees, there was not any concern that other participants would view the transcript. The meetings and interview occurred over approximately a 2-month period according to the availability of my participants.

Assumptions and Limitations

The goal of this case study was to determine if CISD's mentorship program influenced teachers' decision to leave the district, stay, or leave teaching. Because mentorship programs

vary in a multitude of factors, the scope of the study was isolated to one district and the teachers and administrators who worked or had worked in that district. Given the focused nature of this study, readers are cautioned not to assume that the results of this study are applicable in other districts. However, the reader may find similar characteristics of another district's mentorship program within the program studied.

There are also limitations to this embedded case study. Case studies are inherently narrow (Shenton, 2004; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2012) with few participants or sample populations from which to gather data, limiting the transferability of this study to similar mentorship programs. Even though I invited individual subjects with different characteristics, the results of my study were restricted by those who chose to participate. Some demographics may have been overrepresented, and others may not have been represented at all. This can be expected when studying people and their thoughts and actions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) and when those participants are self-selected, as was the case here. Some may not have wanted to expose themselves to analysis. Another limitation is the truthfulness that can be expected from the participants. While every step was taken to protect their identities and their opinions were kept confidential, some may not have completely trusted me. Even though they chose to participate, they still may have had a degree of fear of retaliation if what they have to say is negative against the program. For these reasons, false positive results may have been collected. The opposite would be true for any disgruntled teachers who may have wanted to throw a negative perspective on a program that may have been working well for most others.

Researcher's Role

According to Stake (2010), the case researcher assumes several roles during the process of the study. Each type of role is emphasized, either consciously or subconsciously, at different

times and circumstances. During this case study, I assumed different roles as the situation dictated. One such role is that of an evaluator. I evaluated and studied the mentorship program, looking for characteristics of the program that were helpful to teachers and those which were not. Through the narratives of my participants, I interpreted their meanings and words to understand the merits of the program. Another role I assumed was the biographer. The questions I posed to my participants were both Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The intent of these types of questions was for the participant to answer with a story or narrative about their activities and experiences within the program. The retelling of their stories "present[ed] people as complex … and provocative" (p. 97), and it was my role to document their stories for the purpose of the study.

One of the most important roles (Stake, 2010) I assumed as the researcher was the interpreter. Human knowledge is constructed by experiences, observations, and personal backgrounds. New perceptions of the present mix with old perceptions of the past, continuously creating new knowledge. As the researcher, my job was to gather the interpretations of my participants and construct, or interpret, a common meaning and knowledge from those individual interpretations.

It is important to note here that I once worked at CISD as a teacher. As a new teacher in the district, I was not assigned an official mentor as no official mentor program existed. However, I did have guidance from the department chair who often served as an unofficial mentor and confidant.

Ethical Considerations

The qualitative nature of my case study required that I included ethical safeguards for my participants throughout the entire study. The Belmont Report of 1979, which was issued by the

Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, identified the fundamental guidelines for researchers to follow in the ethical study of human subjects (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The three principles outlined in this report were respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Respect for persons required that I treat my participants as autonomous agents. An autonomous agent in this case was one who had the capacity to decide for themselves if they wanted to participate in the study. I was under the obligation to fully inform the participants of the nature of the study, what was hoped to be gained by the study, what their role in the study was, and what was to be done with the information once I gathered it. They also had the right to know how the study was to be conducted. If at any time a participant wished to withdraw from the study, they had the ability to do so without any consequences. The participants were assured that every effort was made to maintain confidentiality throughout the course of the study. I drafted an informed consent form and emailed it in a Google Form to the participants. They used GoogleSign to sign it or scan the document after they had printed it, signed it, and returned it to me.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research was to determine if CISD's mentorship program influenced the decisions of novice teachers to remain teaching in the district or leave. The interview and surveys were designed to collect data that would reveal the participants' perceptions of the program in practice and their willingness to openly self-reflect. The questions that guided this research were as follows:

RQ1: How do the current practices of the mentorship program align with the original design and intent of the program?

RQ2: How do the participants, mentees, mentors, and administrators perceive the program as being an effective strategy in reducing attrition?

RQ3: What are mentees' perceptions of the influence the mentorship program has on their decision to remain in the district?

RQ4: What are ways to improve the program to reduce teacher attrition rates? Approaching this study in the role of interpreter guided the understanding of the perceptions of the program through the experiences of those who were active in the program. The case study was grounded in the narratives of each of the participants, and the data from the groups represented in the study were triangulated and then analyzed for emerging themes. From the foundational structure created from the emergent themes, I present a holistic analysis that may guide administrators of CISD as they work to improve the district's mentorship program.

Chapter 4: Results

This study was conducted at a small rural public school district in Texas. The city that the district served had a population of 24,000 and a growth rate of 0.4% over the last 10 years. The school district served less than 6,000 students in all grade levels and employed just over 400 teachers and administrators. As discussed in Chapter 1, this district has reported a high teacher turnover rate consistently in recent years. The average turnover in the last 6 years from 2012 to 2018 was 21.4%, compared to the state's average turnover rate of 16.5%. In addition, in 2019, 32.7% of the teachers working in this district had less than 5 years of teaching experience.

Because the high turnover rate of teachers and large number of novice teachers appeared not to be isolated to this focus district, many schools had implemented mentorship programs designed to keep teachers teaching in their districts. The focus district for this study had such a mentorship program, which was designed and implemented in 2013. The purpose of this study was to determine if this district's mentorship program had helped stem the flow of teachers leaving, particularly novice teachers.

Participant Demographics

Potential participants for the study were sent a recruitment email detailing the parameters of the study and the study's purpose. Within the email, potential participants, if they chose to take part in the study, were to choose if they belonged to the mentee group, mentor group, or administration group. The email included a link to each group's survey questions, which the participants selected depending upon their role in the mentorship program. Only one opportunity to respond to the survey was given. Surveys were sent via email to 348 current or recent staff members, either teachers or administrators. Of the 348, 75 responded to the surveys. They were 14 administrators, 36 mentors, and 25 mentees. One of these participants (a mentee) agreed to a

phone survey. Eight participants chose not to complete the survey and instead wrote short paragraphs describing their experiences.

Of the administrators who responded to the survey, 43% worked on an elementary campus, 43% worked on a secondary campus, and 14% worked out of the district office. Of this group, 57% had been in education for 10–15 years, 29% for more than 20 years, and 14% for less than 10 years. Exactly half of the group were female respondents, and the other half were male respondents. The gender composition of the mentor group was 81% female and 19% male. Of the mentors, 28% had been teaching between 5 and 10 years, 36% from 10 to 20 years, and 36% more than 20 years. Most of the respondents in this group (75%) taught at the secondary level, whereas 19% taught on an elementary campus and 6% taught both secondary and elementary. From the mentee group in the study, 68% of the respondents were female and 32% were male. At the time of data collection, 76% were in their third year of teaching, 8% were in their second year, and 16% were in their first year of teaching. Overall, 80% taught at the secondary level and 20% taught at the elementary level. All of the mentee participants had taught only at the target district.

Data Collection Process

Data collection for this study spanned a 3-week window. Even though the time frame appears relatively short, the process for getting the surveys to the prospective participants was difficult due to the 2020 pandemic concerns and the superintendent's wish to put little additional stress on the school's teachers and administrators. After 3 months, final approval was given to email the surveys out to potential participants. The research was conducted via surveys and phone interviews. Personal conversations conducted prior to the formal research in the information-gathering stage about CISD's mentorship program were also documented with the

permission of the participant. Each of the three targeted groups—mentees, mentors, and administrators—were expected to have different perspectives of the influence the district's mentorship program had on mentees' decisions to stay in the teaching profession due to the different roles each group played as they participated in the program. Invitations to participate in the phone interviews were also extended to members of the three groups. All identifying characteristics of the participants including their names, years of service, and subjects taught have been altered to protect their identity.

The analysis process used the collected data to address four research questions:

RQ1: How do the current practices of the mentorship program align with the original design and intent of the program?

RQ2: How do the participants, mentees, mentors, and administrators perceive the program as being an effective strategy in reducing attrition?

RQ3: What are mentees' perceptions of the influence the mentorship program has on their decision to remain in the district?

RQ4: What are ways to improve the program to reduce teacher attrition rates?
Each group was given a different survey with similar questions, each designed to address one of the above research questions, except RQ3. This question was designed specifically to gain the perspective of the mentee. Text from the responses to the surveys, personal narratives, and interviews were analyzed and coded to find common themes between the three groups of participants but also to isolate unique perspectives of each of the groups. Predetermined codes that emerged from the literature review—relationships, stressors, and identity—were applied to the responses from each of the groups. In addition, emergent codes from the analysis were used to guide the identification of themes revealed across all responses. The responses were then

inserted into a coding matrix (Appendix E) according to the research question the responses answered. The matrix revealed which themes were prevalent to each of the research questions.

This chapter presents the research findings for each of the research questions in the order the questions were presented in Chapter 1 of this work. The relevant themes revealed in the analysis and coding process of the narrative responses from the three groups of participants are discussed following each of the questions. The relationships between the three overarching influencers described in Chapter 2 are discussed at the end of this chapter. The conclusions relevant to the district's mentorship program and the influence that it may have had on the mentees' decisions to remain teaching and to remain in the district will be discussed in the next chapter along with limitations and recommendations for school leaders who may choose to read this study.

RQ1: How Do the Current Practices of the Mentorship Program Align With the Original Design and Intent of the Program?

As leadership, both at the district level and at the campus level, has changed since the original framing of the mentorship program, a survey of the current leadership was needed to determine if the mentorship program in practice still aligned with the original design and intent of the program. The survey distributed to administrators included questions focused on knowledge of the elements of the program available for use and the campus's current use of those elements. Survey questions were also sent to mentees and mentors to understand the elements in practice in their work together at individual campuses. The following section discusses the results of the surveys with respect to design and program in practice.

Program Design

In 2010, the original framers of the district's mentorship program intentionally included elements that they felt would be beneficial to the novice teachers who were hired (personal communication, January 25, 2020). When choosing those elements, they also considered the mentors who would service their mentees. Because the first few years of teaching were stressful and difficult to navigate for the beginning teachers and the mentor veterans served as the novices' primary support system, the developers felt that both entities needed some measure of support from campus and district administration. Therefore, the original framers included elements into the program that would support both the mentee and mentors. Elements of the program that were included in the original design to support mentees included same-subject matching of the mentor and mentee, ongoing professional development opportunities, multiyear participation, scheduled time for collaboration with the mentor, and time to collaborate and learn with other mentees in both campus and district-hosted activities. Elements specifically designed to support the mentors in their work to help their mentees were ongoing professional development for mentors, initial mentor training, PLC time with mentees, extra planning time for the mentors, and a stipend for serving as a mentor.

The district representative who directed the mentorship program held professional development sessions periodically, usually six times per school year, for all mentees. The various district departments most closely associated with teachers and their work designed sessions to help the mentees navigate the different aspects of their new positions. Each session covered a different topic chosen by the framers of the program but designed by the departments that were to host them. The directors in curriculum and instruction designed sessions on classroom management, lesson design and planning, quality questioning, and differentiated instruction.

Human resources designed sessions to include navigating the district employee benefits and district policies. The technology department helped the novices with the computer systems and processes including the electronic grading systems and attendance taking, personal absence reporting, and the various electronic teaching resources available to them such as their Smart Boards, document cameras, and in-classroom projectors. And finally, the special education department helped the novices with national, state, and local laws concerning the educational needs and services of the special education students in the district.

The framers also planned for each of the campuses to have some flexibility with implementation of the mentorship program for their teachers. Just as every novice teacher needs a different level of support, every campus also needs some elements of the program more so than others. Because the campuses differ in grade levels taught—for example, secondary level concerns greatly differ from those of the elementary level due to class schedules, extracurricular activities, and maturity of students—mentorship programs would need to look different from one campus to another. Therefore, implementation would need to take the needs of the campus into consideration. For those reasons, district leaders allowed campus leaders the autonomy to implement their mentorship program in ways that would meet the needs of the teachers, unique to the campus.

Program Design Versus Fidelity of Implementation

Administrators implementing the mentorship program must be knowledgeable on all elements of the program that are available. This section discusses the relationships, similarities, and differences between the program's intended design in 2013 and the actualization of the program's current implementation throughout the district.

Implementation of the Program Elements. The district's mentorship program was originally designed with 11 components available for administrators to implement according to the needs on their campuses. Figure 5 shows the program elements and the percentage of administrators who implemented each of those elements on their specific campus. Of the surveyed campus administrators, 64.3% utilized the available mentor training in the campus mentorship programs. Mentors' responses to the question regarding initial training concurred in that 50% indicated that they had been through this training prior to serving as a mentor. The original design of the program also included two other elements specific to training: ongoing professional development for mentees and mentors and initial professional development for the mentors. Only 35.7% of the campus programs utilized professional development for mentees, and only 14.3% allowed for the continued professional development of the mentors. The original framers of the program included four elements connected to time for collaboration and planning. These were (a) built-in time for collaboration, (b) PLC time with other teachers in the department, (c) time to collaborate with other mentees, and (d) extra planning time for mentors. However, based on the responses from the administrators, these elements were not utilized by all. Only seven allowed built-in time for collaboration in the teachers' daily schedules, eight assigned PLC time with the mentees' team, four campus leaders allowed time for mentees to collaborate with other mentees, and two leaders gave their mentors extra planning time to help manage their duties. Of the 14 who responded, only five had implemented subject matching and stipends for mentors. Seven of the participating administrators indicated that they allowed for mentors to receive a stipend out of their campus budget, and only five matched their mentees with a mentor who had taught the same subject. Most of the surveyed campus administrators

were not aware that a stipend existed for their mentors. As a result, seven campus leaders gave

their mentors a stipend.

Figure 5

Program Element Usage Comparison

Program Element Implementation Comparison

Element	Value
WHOLE DISTRICT COLLABORATION	6
EXTRA PLANNING TIME FOR MENTORS	2
MENTOR STIPEND	7
SCHEDULED TIME WITH OTHER MENTEES	4
PLC TIME WITH TEAM	8
SCHEDULED MENTEE/MENTOR COLLABORATION…	7
MULTI-YEAR PARTICIPATION	4
INITIAL MENTOR TRAINING	9
ONGOING PD FOR MENTORS	2
ONGOING PD FOR MENTEES	5
SUBJECT MATCHING	5

■ Campus Administrators Who Implement Each Element

   Usage of Program Elements. There were many possible explanations for not

implementing some of the program elements that were included in the original design. Lack of

knowledge of the elements' existence, as with the stipend option; constrictions related to master

schedules; and availability of teachers especially at the secondary level appeared to have an

impact on the campus leaders' usage of the elements available to them. This section explores

those possible explanations based on the responses from administrators and the perceptions of

mentees and mentors connected to those elements.

   Mentor Stipends. Over the last 10 years, leadership's consistent use of mentor stipends

has changed both in the district and at the campuses. Few of the original framers were still

employed by the district, and none of the first campus administrators who initially implemented

their mentorship program were still on those campuses. Most had either retired or moved on to advance their careers. Consequently, practices have also changed. Some of the current campus administrators made comments that indicated they were unaware of the facets of the program, including stipends. They merely worked off the previous administrator's practices rather than the districts' original program documents. One administrator who responded to the survey commented that in her first year as an elementary principal, she just followed the plan of the previous principal, who had followed the one before her in regard to stipends for mentors. Another administrator believed the program would benefit from additional stipends for mentors, leading one to believe that he was also unaware of the program element. He commented that the "lack of funding for mentors" was a considerable obstacle in being able to recruit, train, and retain valuable mentors. Like several other campus leaders, both of these principals were unaware that mentor stipends were available for the mentors on their campus.

Some mentors were also unaware of the availability of the stipend element of the district's mentorship program. Only 36.1% of the mentors who completed the survey currently received or had previously received additional compensation or a stipend for the extra time and work of mentoring. One participant was adamant that she was not in the teaching profession for the money she received, but she admitted that extra funds would help. She believed that if the campus administrators would give an additional stipend to mentors, "they would feel validated in their work." It would show that administration "needed and valued the all the extra work they did" for their mentees and students. Another wrote that even though she likes mentoring, she is "frustrated" that mentors do not get compensated for the extra time and work involved in being a mentor. Despite the evident boost to morale that a stipend would give to mentors, few campuses

in the district had implemented that element of the original design, evidently unaware that it has been available.

Mentor/Mentee Matching Practices. As discussed in the literature review, mentee and mentor matching can be crucial for the success of the mentee and can contribute to their willingness to continue teaching. The original design of this district's program called for mentor/mentee matching to be made by the district prior to the start of the school year. The intention of the design was that mentees and their mentors would be matched by subject matter or taught and proximity to each other. A mentor respondent indicated that teaching in the same building was more of a determining matching factor than any other consideration, like same-subject matching. When administrators were asked which factors determined how they matched the mentees and mentors at the start of school, they indicated that random selection was the most commonly used method, with a 42.9% application. Same-grade matching was the next most popular method at 35.7%, and same-subject matching was the factor least considered at 28.6%. When asked about the same-subject mentor matching element, an elementary principal wrote in the survey that the option would be "nice to be able to use, but the number of new teachers at [her] campus outnumbered the veterans." Therefore, she was forced to assign mentors randomly, matching them by proximity in the building if she could, rather than by any other factor.

Several administrators wrote that often the success of the mentee was dependent upon a match with the correct mentor and worked hard to make good matches, often changing the matches that the district made. An administrator wrote that "successes with mentors/mentees [matching] have been through the direction of the campus and not the direction of the district mentee program." She also wrote that the campuses "have been better able to match mentees with mentors" because they "have a better understanding of the immediate needs of the

mentees." Another administrator indicated that when he "chooses the correct mentor for the new employee, it can work." He has "seen new teachers, when matched with the right mentors, continue to improve throughout the year." These principals may have deviated from the written district plan, but he felt the deviation was necessary for the success of his teachers.

Mentee participants also wrote on the importance of having the right mentor. A secondary mentee penned that her originally assigned mentor did not teach in her department, nor was she located close to her in the building. They rarely spoke to each other throughout her first year. Therefore, she "did not consider her a mentor because [she] never went to her for guidance." This mentee blamed "the ineffectiveness of the 'assigned' mentor" on the lack of same-subject mentor/mentee matching and the lack of her accessibility to her mentor prior to the start of school. For her, the program held no merit.

Time Considerations for Mentees to Meet With Mentors. The original framers of the district's mentorship program included four separate elements in the program's original design related to time spent with mentees. The time elements included built-in time for collaboration, extra planning time for mentors, time for mentees to collaborate with other mentees, and PLC time for mentees with their teams. This indicates that they believed in the value of the time that mentees and mentors had together for the success of the mentees. However, as discussed previously in this chapter, these elements had not been fully utilized by all administrators.

Secondary administrators cited scheduling constraints as the most likely factor that prohibits them giving scheduled time within the school day for mentors to fully service their mentees. The various electives, required courses, and athletic considerations at a secondary campus often drive when teachers will have a conference period. In addition, administrators at campuses across the district have been forced to give their mentors four or more mentees due to

the large number of novice teachers hired. This was indicated by the percentages of novice teachers reported in Chapter 1. If the schedules allowed for identical planning times, then that "was just a happy coincidence," wrote one administrator.

Mentors also responded that scheduled time to meet with mentees is crucial for the success of the mentees. A secondary mentor wrote that she wanted to observe the mentees in their classrooms, work with them on lesson planning and development, and help analyze the mentees' students' performances. In order to provide this level of service to her mentees, she would have required a scheduled planning time in addition to the one she needs for her own classroom planning. With at least two, sometimes three or four, mentees every year, scheduling "purposeful time" with each mentee is "impossible and improbable." Consequently, mentors commented that the program is not ideal for helping mentees.

Conversely, elementary administrators reported that they were better able to utilize the time elements of the mentorship program than perhaps the secondary administrators were. Elementary campuses in the study district typically create schedules where teams of teachers are able to work and plan together. This is made possible because there are so few electives and students attend special classes like physical education and music according to grade level. Schedules created in the manner are difficult to create at the secondary level because students have varied interests and course selections can be extensive. Therefore, scheduling time together for mentees and mentors on the elementary level may be easier. One elementary respondent wrote that she started scheduling time for each of her grade-level teams to meet on a weekly basis after seeing the success of one team that was able to carve out that time from their personal schedules after school hours.

RQ2: How Do the Participants, Mentees, Mentors, and Administrators Perceive the Program as Being an Effective Strategy in Reducing Attrition?

As discussed previously in this work, the attrition rates of novice teachers have been reported to be nearly 50% in the first 5 years of service, thus spurring the movement of the implementation of a mentorship program to help new teachers with their craft. The themes that emerged from the coding and analysis of the responses relative to their perceptions of the effectiveness of the focus district's mentorship program are discussed in this section.

Relationships: A Key Component For Success

Many of the respondents across all three groups surveyed wrote that relationships were a key component to the success of the program as measured in reduced teacher turnover. The ability to develop good working relationships was reported to make a difference in the mentee's success as well.

Matching With the Right Mentor. The participants in all three groups surveyed were asked how important the relationships that mentees and their mentors developed were for keeping new teachers in the profession. All participants across the groups agreed that fostering these relationships was extremely important for the mentees' success. However, out of the administrator group, only the male administrators expanded their thoughts on how purposeful mentor/mentee matching has been helpful to the success of their mentees. When matched with the right mentor, novice teachers will be more likely to stay in the profession according to some of the surveyed administrators. An administrator wrote that "mentees have a sounding board for concerns they may be having" when they are able to develop a good working relationship and a level of trust with their mentor. A secondary administrator "strongly believe[s] [mentoring] gives first year teachers an opportunity to feel connected and supported" when matched with the right

mentor. Selective matching and "changing mentors based on the needs of the mentee" and developing personalities and skills made a difference in helping keep teachers at a secondary campus.

Mentors and mentees who participated in the study also commented on the importance of their relationships with their mentees. A mentor commented that "successes have been almost entirely around relationships; the positive relationships with … instructors … have led to greater achievements both in and out of the classroom" for mentees. Thoughtful matching practices "helped … build relationships with other teachers" and "helps build successful colleagues." Another mentor feels that she has failed her mentee because he is upstairs and she "keeps forgetting to check in on him." This lack of contact created by distance in the building makes forming relationships with mentees even more difficult.

Random matching practices appeared to have less success in retaining the district's novice teachers than other matching practices. A mentee who was matched with a mentor outside of her department, whom she "didn't really speak to much during [her] first year … or consider her a mentor because [she] never went to her for guidance," struggled until she found someone within her department from whom she could learn. She reported that the veteran teacher she started going to for the help and guidance she needed "is part of the mentorship program but for some reason was not assigned" to her. When mentees are matched with the wrong mentor, perhaps one from a different subject or location, the mentors have "no motivation or time to help the new teacher, and there is no specific framework for the mentor to teach the mentee," wrote an administrator. When this happens, the program has been perceived as a failure. However, when matched with the right mentor, the program has been viewed more favorably because the mentees "continue to improve throughout the year" and continue to teach in subsequent years.

Time Together. Time for the mentees and mentors to get together to teach, learn, and grow was also expressed as a vital element for the success of a mentorship program. Many administrators agreed that mentees would be more successful "if time was set aside … for the mentor and mentee to sit down, collaborate, and plan" together within the working day. One of the most prevalent complaints from all three groups was the lack of time they had to observe and work with each other. Of the surveyed mentors, 69.4% responded that they had to find their own time to plan together. When administrators were asked about elements of the program that where the most difficult to implement, 85.7% chose scheduling time for the mentors to meet with their mentees. Even though mentees were not specifically asked about the availability of time with their mentors, many of them wrote in the additional comments that difficulties in building relationships stemmed from not having time with their mentors.

Participants from the secondary level seemed to experience more difficulty with scheduling time for mentees and mentors to work together and build the trusting relationships needed. Class schedules and the necessity for both parties to have a full teaching schedule make aligning conference periods difficult. One administrator wrote that because they are "always under a time constraint during school hours, mentor teachers are not available to observe mentees in the classroom, hindering the mentor's guidance, advice, and wisdom." A mentor also replied that she did not really know her mentee because he was upstairs. She wrote, "I forget to check on him from time to time. I do see him working long hours and I am afraid I have not given him enough direction."

Unlike secondary respondents, those from the elementary level answered more positively about having available scheduled time for mentees and mentors to develop good working relationships. An administrator at this level intentionally places mentees on the same team as

their mentors. Scheduling in this way ensures that they have the same conference times, giving the entire team the ability to work and solve problems together. A mentor wrote that her administrator was able to give her time to meet with her mentee "almost weekly one-to-one and two times a week with [their] grade level members." Not only did they have time to develop a good relationship between the two of them, the mentee also had time to confer with other members of the team, creating a larger community with which to work.

Many who responded to the survey agreed that the success of the mentees and their desire to remain in the teaching profession depend heavily on their ability to develop good relationships with their mentors and other teachers. Having a "sounding board to express concerns" and "someone that can provide immediate feedback" gives the "first year teachers an opportunity to feel connected and supported." The ability to make connections with others on their campus and in the district and the time to facilitate those connections were believed to be likely factors in the positive influence that the mentorship program had on reduction of the attrition rate in the district.

Growth Within the Program

Growth in professional practice is often the barometer used to measure the impact a program has on its members. Therefore, a school's mentorship program may be measured by the opportunities for growth, the improvement of teaching practices, and the achievement of the students who could be affected by such improvements. All three groups responded to questions aimed at discovering the availability of growth opportunities and its impact on the participants' decisions to remain teaching in the district.

Availability of Professional Development. The original framers of the focus district's mentorship program included ongoing professional development for mentees within the structure

of the program. However, when administrators were asked about their knowledge and implementation of the existing elements of the program, only 14.3% of the respondents answered that this element was available and currently utilized within their campus program. Yet 92.9% of these administrators indicated that their novice teachers' ability to implement effective classroom management strategies was one of their biggest concerns for their new teachers. Administrators expressed that they relied on the mentors to carry the burden of delivering professional development that would facilitate growth in the classroom to their mentees as evidenced by this participant's comment:

> [Mentors] are there to offer suggestions, guidance and advice for the mentee so they become proficient at what they are teaching. Mentors are there to help teachers become successful in the classroom and offer guidance and best practices on everyday occurrences in the classroom.

Mentors also concurred that new teachers needed more professional development, particularly with classroom management, above what they were able to give. The district's practice of regularly scheduled after-school professional development was designed to help novice teachers manage their classrooms so that student learning could occur. However, some mentees did not believe that the district-designed sessions met their needs. Two of the participants felt that the mentorship program failed them. In the survey, one commented that the professional development offered by the district focused on the needs of teachers who taught the core subjects such as English, math, science and social studies. For him, who taught a secondary elective course, "professional development had to be found outside the district" because the district-led sessions did little to serve his specific needs. Another felt similarly. She commented that the "new teacher program was basically a joke" for those who taught at the secondary level.

Even though she has grown her program and has been able to introduce advanced courses in her discipline, she does not feel that the professional development within the program helped her in any way because the meetings and trainings were "always geared towards elementary teaching practices, so [they] really didn't mean anything for the high school teachers." For these two teachers, the professional development offered by the district failed them and overshadowed any elements that may have had a positive influence on their reasons to stay.

Improvement of Teaching Practices. Some mentors believed that the issue of improving teaching practices was not necessarily a problem with the professional development sessions. Rather, the issue was in the mentees' unwillingness to learn from those sessions or from the guidance the mentors provided. A mentor wrote:

> I have had mentees that have chosen not to listen to the advice I gave and it is hard to watch them flounder because of that. I have also had two mentees leave in the middle of the year, which was stressful and heart breaking.

She felt that the mentees left the district because they refused the help that was given. Another wrote about an "intern who refused any help or suggestions" and another who would not change the behaviors that gave them the most difficulties in the classroom.

Other mentors responded more positively about their mentees' growth in the classroom and its connection to remaining in the teaching field. One commented that the program and the teacher's willingness to grow was the main reason they kept teaching. Another reported that while her mentee resisted accepting her advice on classroom management techniques, he eventually implemented some of them and experienced positive reactions from his students. Mentees who "absorbed any ideas" that were offered and willing to "tackle any and every

obstacle with a smile" were reported to have marked improvement in teaching techniques. Some received year-end awards for their hard work and willingness to learn and grow.

Mentors' Satisfaction Helps Grow Mentees

The survey also revealed that mentors, as well as their mentees, require some measure of success if the mentorship experience is to help retain novice teachers. A theme that emerged from the surveys from mentors was the satisfaction they received from working with their mentees and seeing them succeed. Most mentors wrote that helping grow young teachers filled a need that they had for themselves. Even though one mentor discussed the initial "anger" she felt over being assigned a mentor and how it took away from her own teaching and work, after each successful year with a mentee, she felt a sense of gratification that she helped bring in another teacher to the profession. Others commented that they felt they were "contributing to the future" and were proud to share their knowledge and experiences. Being a mentor allows them "to pass on what [they] do well in the classroom which in turn helps more students." They reported that being involved in the program gives them a sense of sharing, giving back, and making a difference in the lives of new teachers.

Mentoring appears to give professional benefits to not only mentees but mentors as well. Some participants reported that mentoring helps "to stay fresh with the new and innovative ideas … of the education profession" and helped others improve leadership and communication skills while making them "more conscious of how and why" they do things in their own classrooms.

Mentors and administrators agree that when a novice teacher grows in their craft, develops good working relationships, and feels some level of success in the classroom, their propensity to remain in the teaching profession grows as well.

RQ3: What Are Mentees' Perceptions of the Influence the Mentorship Program Has on

Their Decision to Remain in the District?

Because this research question specifically addressed the mentees' perceptions and their

personal choices, only responses from the mentees are addressed in the following section. It is

important to note at this time that no teacher who participated in the district's mentorship

program in any capacity and had left the district responded to the surveys. Consequently, the

description of responses in this section were gathered solely from current mentees and those who

had been mentees in previous years—all of whom are still employed in the district.

The vignette in this section describes one mentee's experience in his own words, where

applicable. This mentee discussed a hesitation to have anything in writing that criticized the

program. However, he had few comments that were directly related to the program. Most of his

comments spoke more to the relationships he had developed with his campus mentors and his

district instructional leader. The mentorship program and elements such as a same-subject

mentor, on-going professional development, and a common planning period with other members

of his team, including his mentor, helped him get through some rough situations where he

questioned his enthusiasm for teaching. The emergent themes from this narrative were

relationships, growth, and identity and were reflective of other mentees' responses and themes.

His experiences are as follows.

Relationship With Assigned Mentor

One of the topics that the mentee discussed in his interview was the relationship he had

with his assigned mentor. The following section reflects his comments on this topic:

> That first year was really rough. I've never had issues with getting along with
>
> people and working as a team. But I knew something wasn't working. I tried to teach the

way the team taught, using the same techniques and strategies for lesson delivery and classroom management. My assigned mentor insisted I do everything the same way she had done for years. They worked for her. They would work for me, right? Well, they didn't. I was so frustrated that I quit going to the meetings and she quit visiting my classroom. I was ready to quit in December that first year.

I didn't blame the program. Rather, the issue was the mentor I was assigned and my fear to trust my instincts. I finally found fellow teachers who encourage me to go rogue and teach my way. What did I have to lose? My kids' scores on common assessments were not great and I was miserable. I'm sure the kids were too. So, I kept the same content but used my personality and enthusiasm for literature to drive my work.

Creating Identity

This mentee also struggled with his identity as an effective teacher when working with his assigned mentor. After collaborating with his found mentors and fellow teachers, he made significant changes in the classroom that addressed the needs of creating his own identity. This section contains a discussion of those changes and the effect they had on his self-worth:

When we came back from Christmas, the kids saw a new me and a new classroom. My newly found mentors and my district curriculum director encouraged me to change all my lessons and the arrangement of my whole room to fit my style. Immediately, the vibe of my classroom changed. The energy went up and discipline issues went down. The best part was that the students' scores went up too.

Back then, I thought the program was terrible. It didn't seem to allow for creativity and individuality. Looking back on it now, it wasn't the program as a whole program that was the problem, it was how the campus administration assigned my mentor

that was the problem. I needed to own the lessons and the delivery, and I couldn't do that

teaching like my assigned mentor. She was good, but she wasn't me. When others pushed

me and gave me permission to be different, I began to enjoy myself and wanted to come

to work again.

What made me love teaching were the relationships I was able to develop with my

kids and the mentors who encouraged me. I had opportunities to make a lot more money

in a different industry but knew that wouldn't be as fulfilling as working with kids. The

mentorship program had little to do with the decision to remain at CISD. It was those

kids.

In this mentee's opinion, the program's only weakness and where it failed him was the

way the district leaders assigned mentors to the mentees. The only criterion that he felt was

considered in this match was same-subject teaching. The mentor who was assigned to him stifled

his creativity. Her lesson activities were designed so that she could maintain a calm and stable

classroom environment, "which worked for her." However, her advice felt "constricting and

suffocating" to him. He thought that a mentor who was more adventurous and willing to take

chances regardless of the subject matter taught would have been a better fit for him. While the

mentee would not say that the mentorship program was the deciding factor in his decision to

remain teaching, he did say that some aspects of the program, especially the relationship he was

able to build with other teachers and the professional learning opportunities the program

provided, did help make him a better teacher.

RQ4: What Are Ways to Improve the Program to Reduce Teacher Attrition Rates?

While the original framers of the focus district's mentorship program thought carefully

about the elements that went into it, they currently have no input as to the program in practice on

the individual campuses within the district. According to the survey, none of the campus administrators use or are not aware of all of the components for their programs that are available to them. Consequently, fidelity to the original program design is not ensured. Surveyed administrators are aware that improvements can be made. When asked if they would change the program if they were able, 85.7% replied that they would definitely change some elements of the program and 14.3% replied that they might. The following sections discuss the elements that the campus leaders felt needed some adjustments.

Purposeful Matching

All three surveyed groups felt that the way in which mentees and mentors were matched was important for the success of the mentee. A secondary administrator commented that he has seen "new teachers when matched with right mentors continue to improve throughout the year." Of the 14 administrators who responded to the survey, three recommended that campuses should be able to choose the matches rather than the district leaders. They wrote that "when the principal chooses the correct mentor for the new employee" there would be a better chance that the two would form a good working relationship. Some wrote that subject matching gives the mentor and mentee a common ground and a base from which to work. Another secondary mentor wrote:

> Successes with mentor/mentees have been through the direction of the campus and not the direction of the district mentee program. This has been because we have been better able to match mentees with mentors that have a schedule that matches, and the campus has a better understanding of the immediate needs of the mentee.

The same administrator also suggested that mentors should change each year to "better suit the new employee's personality." Comments also included instances of failures related to poor

matching practices. When concerns about content, grade level, and proximity in the building are not considered when matching mentors with mentees, the possibility that the teacher may leave could grow.

Scheduling Time

Another suggestion for changing the district's mentorship program is scheduling time for the mentors and mentees to meet. The secondary grade levels reported more frequently that their mentors had difficulty finding enough time with their mentees to provide the quality of services that the mentee needed. They had few opportunities for observation and reflection and limited opportunities to meet for planning. Administrators and mentors felt that if time could be scheduled in their day, even if only once a week, the mentors would be better able to help their mentees grow. One administrator suggested that the district hire one person per campus to serve as a mentor for new teachers at that campus. That would enable mentees to have a dedicated person to help them plan, solve problems, and grow in their craft.

Differentiated Training

Two of the mentees from the secondary level were particularly frustrated with the district designed professional development. One wrote:

> The new teacher program was basically a joke. They had a new teacher mentor program and we went to meetings, but they were always geared towards elementary teaching practices, so it really didn't mean anything for the high school teachers.

Others felt that the training opportunities were focused on the core subjects but did not consider those who taught elective courses. Administrators commented that more structured and a wider variety of professional training opportunities should be available to meet the needs of all teachers.

Summary

This chapter presented each of the research questions and presented evidence from the surveys in an effort to answer those questions. After analyzing the narratives and coding for emergent themes, I saw several common themes emerge. The three most common themes related to the success of the mentee and the relevance of the mentorship program were *scheduled time with mentees to meet with mentors*, *mentee/mentor matching practices*, and *relationship building*. The results showed that all groups found that scheduling time for mentees and mentors to meet for valuable collaboration and learning was limited but highly desired across the three groups. The groups also agree in their responses about mentee/mentor matching. The mentee group appeared to be more satisfied and positive about the program if matched with a mentor with whom they could develop a good relationship. Mentors also felt that personalities of the mentees and mentors should be considered when matching. Administrators responded that subject or location proximity took priority when matching mentors and mentees. Of the emergent themes from all the narratives, the ability to build positive relationships with others, including campus administration, district administration, mentors, and other teachers was most often expressed by all groups as having the greatest factor in retaining teachers to the district.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

As public schools struggle with high turnover rates of teachers, especially novice teachers in their first 5 years of teaching, school leaders find that the cost of this turnover is not just a fiscal problem but also a student achievement problem. Studies detailed in the literature review suggested that there is a high fiscal cost to the school district for training and supporting new teachers in the revolving-door climate of high attrition. Other studies suggested that new teachers struggling with learning their profession while on the job might have an influence on the education and achievement of their students. In order to lower the cost of both of these ramifications of high turnover, schools have created and implemented teacher mentorship programs aimed at helping novice teachers learn their craft and thereby retaining them longer.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine one school's mentorship program to determine if it has any influence on the novice teachers' decision to remain teaching in the district. The study was conducted via electronic surveys consisting of a combination of Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions, the responses to which would ostensibly answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the current practices of the mentorship program align with the original design and intent of the program?

RQ2: How do the participants, mentees, mentors, and administrators perceive the program as being an effective strategy in reducing attrition?

RQ3: What are mentees' perceptions of the influence the mentorship program has on their decision to remain in the district?

RQ4: What are ways to improve the program to reduce teacher attrition rates?

Surveys were sent to all teachers and administrators in the case-study district. The three target groups were mentees, mentors, and administrators, all of whom must have participated at some point in the mentorship program at the target district. Participants self-selected which group they thought most fit their role in the program. Of the 348 individuals who received the surveys, 75 responded. Those 75 who responded were also invited to take part in a phone interview. Of those, one agreed to do the phone interview.

This study has some limitations that should be considered and will be discussed in depth later in this chapter. The factors surrounding the limitations are the self-selecting nature of the surveys, the fact that the participants self-reported, the limited number of respondents, and the inherent nature of a case study itself. Because of these limiting elements, caution should be taken when generalizing the results of the study across other school districts.

This chapter explores how the results of the research study are relevant to the literature on the influence of mentorship programs on novice teachers previously reviewed. Limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter as are recommendations for school and district leaders pursuing avenues for implementation of a new mentorship program or improvement of an existing one. Following limitations and recommendations, this chapter concludes with final thoughts on the target district's mentorship program in practice.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

The research literature disclosed many common factors as well as problems in practice that may contribute to the high percentage of new teachers who leave their current teaching position either for another in a different district or who leave the profession. This study corroborated many of these factors, both favorable and harmful, that may have influenced the mentees' commitment to their present position and current district.

Past studies (Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012) discussed the need for the practice of self-reflection and adjustment on the part of the mentee. These self-regulation practices were shown to increase teacher effectiveness and self-actualization as a teacher. The current study showed no evidence of explicit self-regulation practices although some mentees may be naturally inclined to these habits. Another practice that has shown to improve teacher growth and satisfaction was the existence of PLCs (DuFour, 2007). However, even though the elementary campuses appeared to have PLC meetings, the results indicated that the meetings, although frequent, were general meetings regarding lesson planning rather than true learning opportunities for members. PLCs did not appear to exist at the secondary campuses. Another element in mentor program design that was shown to be effective was the full-release model rather than the site-based model of mentoring (Flint et al., 2011; West, 2019). The study school incorporated the site-based model as resources were limited. Nevertheless, according to a district administrator, there are several content-specific instructional coaches whose only duty is to help teachers improve their teaching skills. Unfortunately, at the time of the study, there were only four coaches serving over 300 teachers, making the scope of their effectiveness quite narrow.

In the current study, I found that some campuses have been utilizing a traditional Maslow's approach to mentoring. All novice teachers were supplied with PD and assistance according to the level of Maslow's that had been previously covered by campus leaders. However, the findings of this study suggested that this linear approach to meeting the needs of the campus's novice teachers with a one-size-fits-all program design may not satisfy the needs of every teacher. Designing a mentorship program formulated on the concept that the lowest level of the accepted model of Maslow's hierarchy—physiological needs—and moving to the top to self-actualization in an exact order could be a faulty assumption. The findings in this study

suggest that a more organic, less rigid, program would be more beneficial to helping novice teachers remain in the business and in the district.

RQ1: How Do the Current Practices of the Mentorship Program Align With the Original Design and Intent of the Program?

With the goal of answering RQ1 concerning program design and fidelity of implementation, the study conducted at the target school revealed several themes that emerged in the responses of the participants. Responses that applied to Research Question one revealed two themes, *relationships* and *scheduled time*, that were consistent throughout all three groups surveyed. Mentees, mentors, and administrators responded frequently that mentees must be able to build positive relationships with their mentees and others for them to feel successful within the program. Members in all three groups also wrote about not having enough time with the mentees to be able to support them fully in their work. Furthermore, mentors felt that they did not have ample time to complete their own work on top of the extra duties involved with mentoring. Building scheduled time into the program design may enable the mentors to work more effectively with their mentees and build better working relationships.

RQ2: How Do the Participants, Mentees, Mentors, and Administrators Perceive the Program as Being an Effective Strategy in Reducing Attrition?

According to the response in the survey, those that had positive experiences within the mentoring program felt that the program helped teachers learn their craft more effectively than if the mentees had been left to their own devices. Mentees felt that the program activities and interactions helped them most with lesson design, classroom management, and district policies and procedures. Only three of the 25 mentees who responded to the survey said that the program as a whole was of little help to them. Mentors and administrators who responded to the survey

felt that the program is important to training and retaining new teachers but allowed that changes in program implementation would have a greater impact on teacher retention. These two groups also indicated that not all mentees needed the same level of support and that the program needed more flexibility so that they could offer more individualized assistance through the mentees' first years in the teaching field.

RQ3: What Are Mentees' Perceptions of the Influence the Mentorship Program Has on Their Decision to Remain in the District?

Besides *relationships* and *time*, responses from the mentee participants that applied to answering RQ3 revealed *support* and a positive *identity* as a teacher as predominant themes. Not all mentees surveyed needed the same amount of support nor the same kind of support at the time of the study. One of the participants needed a boost in self-esteem but was not dependent upon his social and relationship needs being met. Of the three perception influencers identified in the literature review, identity as a teacher and knowing that his pedagogic philosophy and style did not have to match that of his assigned mentor gave him the confidence to stay in the profession. A traditional linear, bottom-to-top triangular application of Maslow's hierarchy (Mcleod, 2020) to this mentee was not appropriate. The lower social needs, represented in the middle of the triangle, did not have to be met before his esteem needs or self-actualization needs at the top were satisfied. In fact, this mentee's experiences suggested a more organic application of Maslow's hierarchy, as suggested in the literature review.

A relatively large number of mentees' responses suggested that relationships and social needs were more important than other needs designated on the pyramid. The traditional interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy has been visually represented in a triangle as discussed in the literature review. This triangle suggests that prior to meeting the needs at the top or even in

the middle of the triangle, those at the base must be met. However, the findings of this study showed that the degree of positive relationships, or social needs, felt by the mentee influenced the mentee's self-fulfillment needs, skipping right over the need for recognition. For these participants, it would appear that the middle step of the pyramid should in fact be the top because of its importance to the mentees' well-being. Again, the rigid nature of traditional interpretations appeared to be flawed. For these mentees, relationships were the most prominent of the perception influencers. For some participants, the ability or inability to consistently communicate and work with others in a positive way appeared to influence the perception of the mentorship program as a whole.

The findings of this current study corroborated what prior researchers found (Atkins, 2019; Gallo, 2018; Horn, 2008) with regard to the importance of relationships and communication between mentors and mentees. Horn (2008) contended that interactions between the participants enhanced growth for the participants. One mentee responded in the survey that she had no interactions with her mentor in her first year and felt like she failed her students due to her lack of growth and learning. Her search and then finding a new mentor with whom she developed a mutual trust and working relationship supported Gallo's (2018) and Atkins's (2019) research on relationships developed in mentorship practices. They found that when mentees were able to form positive and productive relationships with their mentor and other teachers, the mentees had a higher likelihood of remaining in the teaching profession.

Mentorship Program as a Complex System. The study also revealed that the mentorship program was believed to be more successful as a complex system (Horn, 2008; Rosenhead et al., 2019) rather than as a static one. When campus administrators made changes to their individual campus mentorship program in order to meet the varying needs of the

participants, rather than comply with a one-size-fits-all static program, mentees' perceptions of their experiences within the program appeared to be more positive than those of mentees who taught at campuses with a more rigid implementation of the program. A flexible program, one that allows for changes and adaptations, would better support the needs of the district's teachers. An administrator responded in the survey that if he had the authority to change the mentor/mentee match as the mentee grew and the needs changed, his implementation of the program on his campus would be more successful. Like Horn (2008) in his explanation of complex systems, this administrator felt that by observing the changing behaviors and interactions between mentees and their mentors, he could adapt the program to meet the needs of his teachers rather than try to place them into a rigid, inflexible system that would work only for a few mentees.

When applying the revised interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy, administrators may be able to assess the needs of each individual and meet them where they are rather than on an assumption of where they should be. One mentee might feel that safety and security measures must be in place and practiced before they are able to concentrate on teaching, whereas another may feel that a social network within the workplace takes precedence over safety and security. The new application of Maslow's theory considers that needs are complex and ever evolving. The satisfaction of one need does not necessarily indicate movement to the next level of the traditional triangle. Instead, it may trigger any number of needs in any position, hence the circular, intertwined revision of the visual.

Some of the elements of the district's mentorship program appear to be rigid and allow little room for flexibility for campus administrators. One of the inflexible factors that appeared to be ineffective overall was the mentor/mentee matching practices. District leaders choose the

matches prior to the start of the year based on the campus where both the mentee and mentor would be teaching and the availability of mentors. Some respondents throughout all three groups expressed the importance of relationships and having someone to turn to or collaborate with. When the match is unsuccessful, those relationships flounder. Another rigid element of the CISD's current program is the timing of the district-led professional development sessions. According to a district administrator these sessions are usually predetermined at the beginning of the school year and are based on historical perceptions of need.

RQ4: What Are Ways to Improve the Program to Reduce Teacher Attrition Rates?

Despite the seeming inflexibility, an examination of CISD's mentorship program through the perceptions of its participants revealed that the program was sometimes more organic than it was rigid. Several respondents searched for and found unofficial mentors outside the program when their assigned mentor did not work out to the extent needed. Matching people to work together for a 3-year period may be tenuous when personalities and circumstances of the individuals are unknown. It was not apparent if administrators supported the changes in matching, as questions to that nature were not asked. None of the mentees or mentors made mention of any adverse effects related to the adaptation they initiated. That there were benefits to the mentees as a result of the unofficial changes could be interpreted from the optimistic tone in responses they gave. In addition, most respondents wrote that they were satisfied with the professional development sessions given by the district. Those who felt that the training sessions did not help them—2 teachers of secondary noncore subjects—found the needed development outside the district.

Most of the mentees expressed that even though the mentorship program may not have been perfect in every aspect, they were able to find what they needed with the help of their mentors or other teachers and staff.

Limitations

While the study successfully revealed the overall positive perceptions of the study district's mentorship program and its influence on novice teachers' decision to remain teaching in the district, there were some limitations that should be considered before leaders plan to duplicate the district's practices. One should be cautioned in the application of the findings of this study across all school districts. These limitations include the self-selecting nature of the surveys, the fact that the participants self-reported, the limited number of respondents, and the inherent nature of a case study itself.

The first limitation of the study was that the surveys were sent to the full population of teachers and administrators at CISD and some who no longer worked there who then decided if they wanted to respond and to which group they belonged. As each group had a different set of questions aimed at answering the research questions, it was imperative that the participants chose the proper group. The survey allowed for only one response, inhibiting the ability to choose a different group if the questions did not pertain to their role in the mentorship program. The self-selection also did not ensure that the sampling of participants' demographics was representative of the districts' staff demographics. For example, a large number of secondary mentors and mentees responded in comparison to those who worked at the elementary campuses. Secondary teachers reported a less positive view of mentor matching and professional development sessions than did the elementary teachers who responded. This could provide a possible opportunity for further research on one subset of teachers and the more specific needs that are unique to that

subset. English teachers also responded more often than teachers who taught other disciplines, possibly giving more credence to their perspectives. Of special note is that no teacher who had left the district chose to respond to the survey or agree to an interview. Consequently, no data were collected that might shed light on their perspectives and why they chose to leave the district.

Another limitation of the study was its self-reporting dependency. The data collected came primarily from the anecdotal accounts of teachers who chose to answer the open-ended questions and the few interviews conducted over the phone. Understandably, the district limited the research to these two applications due to the current COVID-19 outbreaks and the need to keep teachers safe and secure. Therefore, body language was impossible to interpret when the participants responded to the posed questions. The data had to be analyzed simply as words, using semantics to interpret meaning. This one-dimensional analysis of the participants' perceptions might have led to misinterpretations of meaning.

The final limitation of this study in its general application was that it was conducted at a single school district with a small group of participants. Mentorship practices could vary widely from district to district and even from campus to campus within the same district. Therefore, school leaders seeking to implement a new mentorship program or improve an existing one should investigate various other models and conditions that may serve the needs of their unique population of teachers. By doing thorough research and expanding the scope of options prior to implementation, leaders may find the combination of elements that is right for their district.

Implications

The current research suggests one rather broad implication for the district that was studied. The ability to form good relationships between mentors and their mentees seemed to make an impact on the success of the mentees and therefore the mentoring program. The current study and research discussed in the literature review suggest one rather broad implication driven by the recurrent themes revealed during the data analysis. The results suggested that building good working relationships was the greatest factor in determining the success of the program's influence on teacher retention. Within the district that was studied, the inconsistencies of program implementation between campus administrators indicated some variances in satisfaction with the program. District leaders guide the overall program for the campuses, but campus administrators have some flexibility to adjust as needed for their teachers. The level of involvement with implementation and practice of the mentorship program appeared to have some influence over the success of the program and the mentees' satisfaction with their current teaching position. The study suggests administrators' commitment to the novice teachers and their growth within the mentorship program.

Recommendations for Practice

The participants in the study appeared to have an overall positive view of the district's mentoring program. However, there are some recommendations for a more effective program that may help the high teacher turnover rates that the district has historically experienced. Giving campus leaders more flexibility to implement and manage the program on their individual campuses would help them serve their mentees more effectively. Practices that may be effective at the elementary level may not work at the secondary level and vice versa. Campus administrators also know their staff much better than the district administrators would. Giving

the campuses some autonomy to match mentors and mentees may help mentees and mentors develop better working relationships, thereby increasing the likelihood of mentees remaining in the district and teaching.

Recommendations for the Field of Teacher Mentoring

Even though the study revealed an overall positive tone of the participants toward the mentorship program, some recommendations for practice did emerge as a result of the study. The following section offers some suggestions for school leaders when making decisions to implement a new program for mentorship or to improve an existing one. The practical feasibility for inclusion of each of the suggestions should be determined based on the unique characteristics of the district. As discussed in the literature review, three factors influence the perceptions of mentees as they begin their teaching career. These three perception influencers—relationships, stressors, and identity—should be considered when developing plans for the mentorship program.

Relationship considerations were discussed most, both in the literature review and in the responses from the participants. Horn (2008) discussed that without interactions between the agents of a system, there would be no growth. Similarly, mentees who reported having little interaction with their assigned mentors, and therefore were unable to develop a mutual trust, experienced little satisfaction in their experiences within the program. Mentors and campus administrators also commented that the lack of scheduled time the mentees and mentors had together contributed to a lack of success for the mentee. The secondary respondents, especially, wrote that finding time to meet within the workday was difficult due to class scheduling issues. Without time together to work through any difficulties and understand where problems occur, relationships at a level of trust and confidence could be difficult to establish.

When school leaders consider elements to include or improve upon, the results of this study indicate that school leaders, either at the campus or district level, should consider a scheduled time for mentors and mentees for growth and learning and establish relationships. Organized professional learning communities (PLCs) where mentors, mentees, and other staff members help with sharing ideas, solving problems, and growing in the profession would not only help build relationships based on commonalities and growth but also create a community filled with others to which the mentees could turn at any given time.

In addition to PLC time for mentees and mentors, the need for structured and monitored self-reflection activities may benefit the mentee in the work to grow in the profession. Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey (2012) postulated that self-regulation and self-reflection are valuable tools new teachers can use to critically view their practices in both learning their craft and developing skills. The need for structure and monitoring was shown in the vignette at the beginning of this work. Andy mistakenly felt that he no longer needed a mentor's guidance after his first year of teaching. He lacked the skills to honestly self-evaluate and change his practices based on the results of the reflection. Mark, on the other hand, was self-regulating in nature. He constantly examined his students' progress in relation to his work and made valuable adjustments accordingly. A structure in the program that would give novice teachers the opportunity to learn how to effectively self-monitor, accept critical feedback, and adjust accordingly may improve both the skills of the teacher and student achievement.

Another suggestion for scheduling an organized time for mentors and mentees to meet is to implement a full-release model (Fletcher & Strong, 2009). The full-release mentors, or instructional coaches, work full time to help their mentees with intensified and directed help. While the CISD program model does include this element in the form of four district

instructional coordinators, only 2 of the respondents wrote of assistance they received from that source. Districts who are able to include instructional coaches into their staff have a person whose complete job focus is on that of helping teachers grow in their craft.

Another recommendation is for program directors to allow the opportunity for the campuses to make changes in mentor/mentee matching as needed. CISD's program assigns mentors at the district level with little knowledge of the mentees and limited knowledge of the mentors. The possibility that the match will result in positive, trusting relationships may be arbitrary at best. Campus administrators who would be more knowledgeable of the mentors would be better able to match personalities once behaviors and characteristics began to emerge. If there was a reevaluation period just after the start of the year, where campus leaders met with mentees and their mentors to discuss progress and growth or any problems that have arisen, changes could be made as necessary for the benefit of both the mentee and mentor. While CISD does have structured time for mentees' learning and growing with other mentees, mentors are not a part of those development sessions. Leaders should consider developing these growth opportunities for both groups where they could learn together, thereby enhancing any relationship bonds that may occur.

In addition, district and campus leaders should consider the stressors for mentees and mentors when designing their school's program. Several CISD mentors indicated that they had three or more mentees on top of their full class load to teach. Mentors also commented that they felt that the success or failure of the mentee and their students rested on the mentors' shoulders. At the secondary level, when mentors have seven classes of students they are directly responsible for, adding the students of the three mentees they are coaching and helping creates even more

weight. Limiting the number of mentees that a mentor has in a given period may help reduce that extra anxiety.

In light of the alarming statistics presented in Chapter 1 of this work, extending the length of the amount of time mentees spend under the tutelage of a mentor beyond 1 or 2 years may help novice teachers remain in their chosen profession. When 50% of all novice teachers leave teaching within their first 5 years, an extension of 2 years in the program so that help is still available and there are others willing to collaborate and provide growth opportunities may do more to lower teacher turnover and attrition rates.

Recommendations for Future Research

Because of the nature of a case-study-based research project, ample opportunity for further research exists. Although school systems may appear to be alike in size, region, and design, the human factor of each school varies. Each public school district consists of people who differ in their talents, abilities, and personalities. A deeper and more thorough understanding of any single district that may be struggling with teacher retention may consider a case-study approach to discovering strengths and weaknesses within their unique system. Also, more narrow research is needed to determine specific campus needs rather than a district-wide study, especially at larger districts with multiple campuses.

Conclusion

For this qualitative case study on CISD's mentorship program and its influences on whether mentees chose to remain teaching in the district, I collected anecdotal data from the district's teachers and administrators. The data were collected using electronic surveys and phone interviews over a period of 2 months. In-person interviews conducted prior to the

pandemic and releasing of the surveys also contributed to the data. The results of the analysis of these data were used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the current practices of the mentorship program align with the original design and intent of the program?

RQ2: How do the participants, mentees, mentors, and administrators perceive the program as being an effective strategy in reducing attrition?

RQ3: What are mentees' perceptions of the influence the mentorship program has on their decision to remain in the district?

RQ4: What are ways to improve the program to reduce teacher attrition rates?

In determining if CISD's mentorship program influenced novice teachers to remain teaching at CISD, contemporary literature was reviewed prior to the case study. Research of the literature revealed three prevailing influencers of perceptions—relationships, stressors, and identity—that mentees may have of the mentorship program within which they are participating. Then anecdotal data were collected, coded, and triangulated for common themes across three groups of participants—mentees, mentors, and administrators. Complexity theory and an adaptation of the traditional Maslow's hierarchy of needs were applied to the themes that emerged.

In the general case of whether CISD's current mentorship program in practice has structures in place that focus on building positive relationships and foster growth, the findings of the study indicated that the program does contain said structures. However, structures are not consistent across the district. How the campus administrators implement these structures has been left to them to decide. Often those decisions have been based on available mentors, the

number of mentees, and campus resources. These determinants can be limiting and may affect the mentees' perceptions of the program overall, either positively or negatively.

The data also showed that the original design and intent of the program have been maintained in its structure with only a few alterations. One of those alterations has been the addition of district instructional coordinators. Although there are only four coordinators that service the entire district, 2 mentee respondents did report positive interactions with their district coordinator. This particular area may be a place for growth for CISD and may help to take some pressure off overloaded mentors. Research in the literature review fully supports the inclusion of full-time mentors as a positive impact on teacher retention.

The study analysis also indicated that most of the respondents across all three groups indicated that the mentorship program was an overall benefit to novice teachers when good working relationships were formed. Mentees who did not have a good partnership with their assigned mentor wrote that they found someone who they could work with and learn from at some level. Although the evidence has not been historically substantiated, recent trends in CISD's turnover rate compared to the percentage of novice teachers the district employs shows a slight reduction in the turnover rate and a lower percentage of teachers with less than 5 years of experience. The assumption might be that novice teachers are remaining in the district and gaining valuable experience.

Finally, the study participants offered only a few suggestions for changing the program in practice in the surveys. One administrator and a mentor suggested a stipend for the extra duties that mentors performed. Another mentor suggested more structured and dedicated time for meeting with her mentees would be helpful. In addition, an administrator wrote that he would

like the opportunity to reevaluate the mentor/mentee match after the first year to adjust for emerging personalities and possible mismatching.

  To conclude this case study of CISD's mentorship program and its effect on novice teachers and the district's teacher turnover rate, those who "carry torches . . . pass them one to another" (Plato, ca. 360 B.C.E./n.d., p. 25). Mentoring is a valuable tool available for school leaders to use in the development and enrichment of newcomers to the profession as they seek to serve the children of their community. Talented individuals willingly pass their knowledge and skills to help those who seek their advice and tutelage. In this study, I explored individual experiences of those who passed the torches, those who received the torches, and those who facilitated the transfer and found that the relationships the participants were able to develop and the program structures in place that precipitated that development were the key components to successful retention of teachers.

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Appendix A: Administrator Survey

1. In what level do you work?

2. What discipline did you primarily teach prior to becoming an administrator?

3. At what level did you teach?

4. Years in Education

5. Gender

6. How important is a mentorship program for new teachers?

7. Was there guidance for you as you implemented the mentorship program?

8. How important is it that teachers understand the goals of the program?

9. Choose which obstacles you encounter with the mentorship program:

10. Choose the characteristics of your mentorship program

11. Do you have funding and resources needed to implement the program?

12. How successful do you feel the program is?

13. Do you believe that the program works to help new teachers remain in the profession?

14. Do you believe the program helps the district retain teachers?

15. Is there support to maintain the program from the district level?

16. How much are you able to interact with the mentorship participants?

17. How are mentors and mentees matched?

18. How often do you get reports from the mentors on progress of the mentees?

19. How important are relationships between you and the mentee for the success of the mentee?

20. How important are relationships between mentors and mentees for the success of the mentee?

21. Would you change the program if you could?

22. Have you ever been a mentor?

23. What do you feel are the biggest concerns for novice teachers?

24. How do you believe the program as it is practiced helps alleviate those concerns?

25. Did you have a mentor early in your career?

26. Have you ever been a mentor?

27. Describe some success you have seen on your campus in regard to the mentorship program.

    _____

28. What have been some of the failures of the program?

    _____

Appendix B: Mentor Survey

1. Number of years teaching

2. At what level do you teach?

3. What discipline do you teach? Choose all that apply

4. Gender

5. Did you receive training prior to being a mentor?

6. Did you have a mentor teacher when you were a novice teacher?

7. Did you experience difficulties in your first two years of teaching?

8. In general, did you have good relationships with veteran teachers, including your mentor if you had one?

9. How many mentees do you serve?

10. Do you have a good relationship between you and your mentee(s)?

11. Your mentee(s) is prepared in prior to the start of the school year in the following: Choose all that apply

12. How much time is scheduled for you to spend with your mentee(s)?

13. How important is the relationship you have with your mentee?

14. Do you feel responsible for the success of your mentee?

15. How much pressure or stress do you receive from administration for the success of your mentee?

16. How much pressure or stress do you receive from your mentee(s)?

17. Did you volunteer to be a mentor?

18. Do you receive a stipend or other compensation for serving as a mentor?

19. Do you like being a mentor?

20. Talk about some successes you have had as a mentor.

_____

21. What are some of the failures?

_____

22. What does being a mentor do for you? Are your needs fulfilled?

_____

Appendix C: Mentee Survey

1. Years teaching

2. Gender

3. At which level do you teach?

4. What subject do you teach? Check all that apply

5. Did you obtain your teaching certification by the traditional university route or did you get an alternative certification?

6. When did you first make the decision to teach?

7. How much contact have you and your mentor had during this first year(s)?

8. Are there other teachers on the campus to whom you go to for help?

9. Choose the areas where your mentor helps you: Choose all that apply

10. Have you had sufficient professional development opportunities?

11. How involved is the campus administration with your learning and growth?

12. Is the campus atmosphere conducive to learning and growing as a teacher?

13. Is there sufficient teamwork among the teachers in the discipline you teach?

14. Do you have avenues to voice the difficulties you may be experiencing?

15. Have you formed any significant relationships with others including but not limited to

16. Do you feel pressure for your students to perform well on STAAR testing?

17. Had the guidance you received to help you manage the STAAR processes been sufficient?

18. Have relationships been important to you during your first years of teaching?

19. Do you like being a teacher?

20. Do you identify yourself as a good and effective teacher?

21. Have there been changed in campus leadership since you have started in the district?

22. Has change in the campus leadership affected you since you have begun teaching at CISD?

23. Talk about some successes you have experienced during your first two years as a teacher.

    _____

24. What failures have you experienced?

    _____

If you have further comments you would like to add, please do so here. (Not Required)

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. Interview Questions

2. What was the relationship like with you and your assigned mentor?

3. How did you adjust?

4. How did the program contribute to the issues?

5. What changes did you make if any?

6. How did the changes affect your classroom practices?

Appendix E: Coding Matrix

Question number	Code	Grade Level	Role Category	M/F	Code	Narrative
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Appendix F: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

August 28, 2020

Joan E. Otten
Department of Organizational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Joan,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Teacher Mentorship Programs' Influence on Novice Teachers' Decision to Stay: A Case Study",

(IRB #20-128) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determinewhether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.

Director of Research and Sponsored Programs