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## **A Study of Variables that Influence Teacher Turnover in the Little Municipal School District**

Paula H. Stokes

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A study of variables that influence teacher turnover in the Little Municipal School  
District

By

Paula Hollingsworth Stokes

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
Mississippi State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Education Administration  
in the Department of Leadership and Foundations

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2013

A study of variables that influence teacher turnover in the Little Municipal School

District

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A teacher shortage is a recognized problem in research on public schools. Schools across the United States must hire and retain highly qualified teachers, but the literature indicates teachers with fewer than 3 years of experience are often leaving teaching, creating a possible teacher shortage of 4.2 million teachers by the year of 2016.

Retaining teachers with less than 3 years of experience is a definite problem in the Little Municipal School District (LMSD). In response to the failure of the LMSD to retain teachers with less experience, a study was conducted to identify the variables effecting teacher turnover. Determining the reasons teachers leave LMSD and facing those issues can assist in addressing the conditions associated with teacher turnover.

This study focused on variables teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience indicate as their reasons for leaving. These variables were compared to studies conducted by Veenman (1988), Ganser (1994), and Ingersoll (2003), leading authorities on teacher retention. The results of this research suggest that teachers with less experience are leaving the LMSD because of pressure to achieve higher state test scores, lack of motivated students, insufficient materials and supplies, heavy teaching loads, inadequate

guidance and support, poor relations with principals and administrators, lack of classroom discipline, and the burden of clerical work.

Recommendations for LMSD include adding four programs to the district: a district-wide mentoring program for less experienced teachers; a teacher–liaison to improve communications between new teachers and administrators; a yearly review of materials to keep classroom materials current; and an incentive program for students to motivate students to achieve. Recommendations for further research include more studies on why teachers remain in low turnover districts, and did teacher’s preparation (alternative vs. traditional) affect retention.

Key words: teacher retention, turnover, rural areas

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to the memory of my parents, Howard and Virginia Hollingsworth, my greatest supporters.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses her sincere gratitude to the people who kept encouraging her to complete this degree. First, thanks go to Dr. Dwight Hare, my advisor and committee chairperson. Dr. Hare is the type of instructor I strive to be. Next, appreciation also goes to Dr. Anthony Olinzock, Dr. Ed Davis, and Dr. Beth Sewell, members of my dissertation committee, for their assistance. Finally, special thanks go to my family and special friends who are family to me. Without your continued support and encouragement, this degree would never have been completed.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Teacher Vacancy” may become the theme of all schools if answers to the teacher shortage do not come soon. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2007) has projected a need for 4.2 million teachers by 2016. Many schools are facing the shortage already, as only a limited number of teachers are available in certain areas of the country or in certain subject areas.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Keeping highly qualified teachers has numerous benefits for schools and students. According to Brewster and Railsback (2001), more teachers are leaving after 3 or fewer years in the classroom, and school districts are spending more time and money on recruiting and hiring replacements each year. Nearly 10 years ago, Darling-Hammond (2003) indicated an average district loss of about \$8,000 for each teacher who leaves in the first 3 years of teaching. A more experienced staff raises student achievement and test scores. Kukla-Acevedo (2009) stated that inexperienced teachers need at least 5 years of experience to become fully effective in improving student performance. Henry, Bastian, and Fortner (2011) agreed that teachers’ effectiveness rises during their second year of experience. Their research shows students taught by second-year teachers have a higher yearly achievement gain than those taught by first-year teachers. Smaller gains occur

between the second and third year. Dillon (2009) added that staffing deficiencies have plagued the teaching profession for so many years those shortages have become accepted as a part of education. Dillon placed teacher turnover as high as nearly 20% annually in rural schools and significantly higher in urban areas.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 2002) discussed the shortage of teachers in terms of increased student enrollment and an increasing number of teachers at retirement age. American schools saw an increase of 53 million students in 2006, requiring more teachers. However, being that half of these teachers are 45 years old or older, they could retire in the year 2016 (NCES, 2007).

Compounding the problem is that some 60% of those trained to teach never do so. Of the 40% that enter the teaching field, an estimated 30% to 50% leave within the first 5 years (NCTAF, 2002). This is not a new problem. Over 10 years ago, Weiss and Weiss (1999) reported nearly 10% of new teachers never make it through the first full year. The NCTAF (2002) stated that this rate is even higher for low-income communities and rural areas. The rate is also nearly 60% higher for those teachers who did not complete student teaching.

Keller (2008) also reported the four most recent Schools and Staffing Surveys and their Teacher Follow-Up Surveys indicated that between 40% and 50% of new teachers leave their jobs within the first 5 years. Harris and Adams (2007) reported that an Economic Policy Institute study of teacher labor markets found that the youngest members of the teaching profession are much more likely to leave their jobs than the youngest members of other occupational groups. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) agreed that

the annual turnover of teachers is relatively higher compared with many other occupations.

Financially, this turnover can be described in dollar values. Around 10 years ago, the NCTA Future (2002) placed the price of recruiting teachers, training new teachers, and using substitute or part-time faculty until a new teacher could be found as high as \$2.1 billion annually in Texas.

Eppley (2009) pointed out that most teachers begin their careers near their home area. This is especially true in small, rural areas. Kelly (2009) added, however, that this rural education is based on loss: the loss of resources, loss of people, loss of schools, and loss of teachers. Thus, the retention of first-year teachers has far reaching implications in the financial areas of education as well as in the improvement of student achievement.

Mississippi also experiences a teacher shortage. Hank Bounds (March 31, 2008), former State Superintendent of Education, reported in his weekly online column, “Almost all school districts have a difficult time finding teachers for particular subject areas, such as math, science, and foreign languages.” According to Bounds, Mississippi has approximately 6,000 teachers annually who could retire. Additionally, Mississippi colleges and universities produce fewer than 1,500 new education majors each year, and only about 900 of these graduates ever enter a Mississippi classroom. Within the first 5 years, approximately half leave the field of education.

With the current economic conditions, schools also experience the effects of budget cuts. Students have to deal with unemployed parents and lack family income. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP, 2010), 53% of Mississippi’s children live in a low-income family as compared to 41% nationally. NCCP



also reported that 83% of these children from low-income families have parents who did not receive a high school education. Suitts (2010) stated that poverty in the South has reached extreme stages and these schools have the least amount of revenue to educate students when they enter school.

In rural Tiny County, Mississippi, the economic problems are most notable. The leading employers of Tiny County (Georgia Pacific and James Machine Works) have reduced their work forces and scheduled layoffs. Another leading employer, The Twinkling Stars Casino, has closed completely during the week and uses Silver Sun Casino employees to cover weekend business. The unemployment rate had risen to an unprecedented 13.2 % in July 2012 with 25% of the county having an income below the poverty level (US Department of Labor, 2012).

However, according to the United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (2003), educational levels of rural Americans are increasing. In 2000, over 40% of adults in rural areas had completed at least 1 year of college. Yet, statistics dropped drastically in the South. One third of the United States' rural population lives in the South, and approximately 50% of adults living in rural areas lack high school diplomas.

As employment opportunities decrease, many families relocate. According to John Doe (personal communications, May 6, 2009), former Superintendent of Education, the Little Municipal School District (LMSD) has lost over a thousand students since 2000. As families relocate to find employment so do many businesses and activities that draw young professionals, such as teachers. Fewer people living in Tiny County generates less revenue, and the school system finds itself in a downward spiral.

This study addressed the variables that have a significant impact on teachers leaving the district. The study also developed suggestions to keep teachers in the district to create a more stable and experienced workforce.

### **Purpose of the Study**

LMSD serves all of Tiny County. First as a teacher and then as a principal in the LMSD, the researcher witnessed first-hand the high teacher turnover rate. In 2008, about one of every three teachers in LMSD was new to the district. During the year, five teachers broke their contracts with the school district and left before the end of the school year. Eight teachers who retired accepted other teaching positions (out-of-state positions, private school employment, or employment at a nearby federally-operated Native American school). Subsequently, the LMSD must continually hire and train new teachers. As Kukla-Acevedo (2009) indicated, new teachers who never became fully effective teachers are replaced by new teachers who never become fully effective teachers.

Ingersoll (2002) found the source of the problem is not a shortage of teachers but a failure to retain teachers for the first years of their career. Schools must focus on ways to retain young teachers instead of finding ways to certify more teachers.

The purpose of this study was to determine the variables that have an effect on first-, second-, and third-year teachers leaving the LMSD. Determining why novice teachers leave LMSD and facing those issues will assist in addressing the conditions associated with teacher turnover. Variables indicated in the literature include poor working conditions, lack of leadership, low wages, and state-mandated tests. These variables are discussed with the findings of this study.

### **Research Questions to Be Answered**

1. Why are teachers leaving the LMSD after 3 or fewer years of teaching?
2. What can the LMSD do in order to provide a more stable workforce?
3. How can the retention rate of new teachers be increased?

### **Definition of Terms**

Administrators include principals and the superintendent of the LMSD.

Non-returning teachers include any teacher who worked for the LMSD for 1 or 2 years and did not accept an offered contract for the following year.

Teachers refer to certified teachers only. Aides and other non-certified staff are not included in this study. Certified teachers include both emergency-certified and licensed teachers.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Research indicates that teacher turnover is at epic proportions across the United States and is causing a teacher shortage in some areas. The assumed reason is that salaries are greater in other areas, thus leading teachers to vacate the lower-paying positions. However, in the LMSD, this is not the case. (Please note that pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation.) The school system is one of the largest employers in the county; therefore, teachers make steady incomes, and they have benefits that many residents of this county do not. However, novice teachers are leaving the district at an alarming rate. Identifying variables that influence teacher turnover is critical in understanding how to address the teacher shortage.

To understand these variables, it is necessary to look at teachers who have left the LMSD. These teachers know the facts about their reasons for leaving and what the district could have done to prevent them from leaving. These teachers also know what would attract and retain a teacher in LMSD.

The researcher is well known in the district as an administrator and a teacher and knows many teachers personally who left the profession. The former teachers of LMSD were comfortable talking about their experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The literature review, especially the studies by Veenman (1984), Gasner (1999), and Ingersoll (2001), provides theories of why teachers leave the profession. Their findings include issues such as working conditions, school location, student demographics, discipline problems, teacher certification requirements, relationships with the administration, collaboration with other teachers, clerical duties, state-mandated testing, and teacher's pay. Each of these issues will need to be discussed with participants to see if it influenced teachers to leave this district. However, if other issues appear during the interviews, these issues will also be discussed.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

Data for the study was collected from teachers who left the LMSD after 1 to 3 years of teaching. Interviews were collected with all willing participants. The superintendent and principals were interviewed about the turnover of novice teachers. Once data were gathered, similarities and differences among participants were analyzed and compared with the findings of Gasner (1999), Veenman (1984), and Ingersoll (2001).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The study will only use teachers who have taught for 1 to 3 years in the LMSD.

### **Significance of the Study**

Before LMSD can employ a stable teacher workforce, research must be conducted to determine why novice teachers leave LMSD. Two of the seven schools within the district have been placed on academic probation by the State of Mississippi due to a decrease in student achievement. Central office administrators are concerned; as LMSD Assistant Superintendent Kent Mulligan (personal communication, May 6, 2009) stated, “If we do not maintain an experienced, qualified staff, we could easily see serious drops in student achievement in several of the district’s schools.” Results of this study will provide LMSD suggestions on how to create a more stable workforce of qualified teachers. Kukla-Acevedo (2009) implied that a more experienced teacher workforce will result in an increase in student achievement.

Other small, rural districts could use the information to assist in addressing issues related to retaining quality faculty. By identifying the issues that are affecting LMSD teachers, this study offers research for other districts and their turnover rates.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The material for this dissertation is organized into five chapters: introduction, literature review, research design, findings, and summary. References follow the body of the research, and supplementary materials are supplied in the appendix.

Chapter one introduces the problem confronting LMSD. Terms and the conceptual framework of the study were explained in this chapter.

Chapter two reviews the literature available. Studies by Veenman (1984), Ganser (1999), and Ingersoll (2002) were especially important in establishing comparative data for this study. Possible variables for the low retention rate of teachers was discussed and connected to available literature.

Chapter three discusses the research design, participants, and data collection procedures used in the study. A discussion of the data analysis procedures used also appears in this chapter.

Chapter four discusses the demographics for each of the seven schools in the LMSD. Participants in the study were discussed individually. Their reasons for leaving LMSD were discussed and compared to findings of Veenman (1984), Ganser (1999), and Ingersoll (2001), the leading researchers of teacher retention issues.

Chapter five presents a summary of material covered in previous chapters. This chapter also discusses the implications that can be made based on this case study, and it offers recommendations for implementation of the findings.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The reasons behind teachers becoming disgruntled with careers in teaching have been researched for decades. Veenman (1984), a Senior Lecturer for the Institute of Education at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, published a meta-analysis of 83 studies concerning problems of beginning elementary and secondary teachers from an international perspective. Using teachers from the Netherlands, Veenman used questionnaires to assess the top five problems teachers encountered: classroom discipline, motivation of students, individual differences among students, assessment of students' work, and relations with parents.

Fifteen years after Veenman's study, Ganser (1999), Director of the Office of Field Experiences at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, conducted a follow-up study. Ganser used Veenman's list of perceived problems, but he randomly arranged the list. Participants were asked to respond by ranking problems with a four-point Likert scale: 4 points – a major problem; 3 points – a problem; 2 points – a minor problem; and 1 point – not a problem. Participants were also able to list other problems. Ganser's (1999) study reported teacher responses indicated the greatest problems as a perceived lack of spare time, a burden of clerical work, and heavy teaching loads.

Since Veenman's (1984) study, questions persist regarding the dissatisfaction among so many teachers. McCann and Johannessen (2003) claimed that a sense of duty

and commitment to help young people was the first indicator in teachers staying in their profession. However, the NCES (2007) estimated 6% of the nation's teaching force leaves the profession yearly and another 7% change schools annually. About 20% of all new hires leave teaching within 3 years in education. The NCES also predicted an increase in the teaching force will be needed by 2016.

Ingersoll (2001) compared the teacher shortage in America to a revolving door. Ingersoll (2003) stated that as many as 39% of beginning teachers leave the teaching profession within the first 5 years to obtain higher paying jobs or different careers. Another 29% of first-year teachers leave due to dissatisfaction in the teaching profession. These teachers listed reasons for leaving as a lack of support from the school administration, student discipline problems, poor student motivation, and the lack of input into school-wide classroom decisions.

The dissatisfaction of novice teachers with careers in education is noticeable; however, the need for an educated populace is also noticeable. By looking at areas of discontent in the teaching profession one can hope to discover the reasons for this dissatisfaction. The literature available on the subject provides some insight that may be transferrable to the LMSD.

This chapter was arranged by literature relating to variables that could possibly affect teacher retention. Articles concerning work conditions, certification, clerical duties required of teachers, teacher pay, and state-mandated testing were discussed individually. A summary ends the chapter.



## **Characteristics of Work Conditions**

A possible variable affecting teacher retention is the teacher's satisfaction with his or her position. Perrachione, Rosser, and Pettersen (2008) implied a strong connection between job satisfaction and teacher retention. They pointed out that satisfaction with a job was closely connected to the working conditions. Perrachione, et al. described work conditions as variables such as the location of the school, demographic variables of the school, job-related characteristics, and work experience.

### **Rural School Location**

In rural areas of the United States, the problems with education are intensified. The reported number of rural districts and schools in the United States varies. Coladarci (2007) found one in five public school students attends school in a rural area, and almost one third of all public schools are located in rural areas. NCES (2009) classified more than 33% of all school students as attending rural schools. These elevated numbers combined with the problems of meeting federal mandates, especially the 100% proficiency in core subject areas required by 2014, and the lower economic base in many states, are cause for researchers to look at rural schools. Barley and Beesley (2007) pointed out that research literature on rural education is scarce.

Eppley (2009) added that the expectations of rural communities for education differ by location. In some rural communities, education is the main priority for the community, and teachers are treated as professionals. Lowe (2006) stated that a school's character is determined by its community, local culture, and the needs of all the stakeholders. The school must have a positive environment for both learning and teaching to occur. Corbett (2009) was in agreement that education reform that ignores both place

and students is not the best solution for rural schools. In other words, every small or rural school must look for specific problem areas and find the best possible solutions.

Beck and Shoffstall (2005) noted that rural schools can be small enough that other disadvantages such as sparse population, isolation, and limited economic development have a major impact on the schools. However, in their study, Beck and Shoffstall (2005) found that some rural schools were performing better than their urban counterparts. They credited small school size, the orderly climate of the school, parental involvement, community support, and the opportunities for students to have leadership roles as reasons for higher scores.

Khattri, Riley, and Kane (1997) also reviewed existing research and found that some students in poor rural areas did better academically than those in poor urban areas. The research, however, was limited in understanding this correlation. Barley and Beesley (2007) concluded that true correlations about rural areas could not be made until further research was completed. They suggested that studies were needed to compare successful high-needs schools with those not successful in both rural and non rural areas.

Barley and Beesley (2007) also stated that the school becomes an essential element of a rural community. The community's support of the school makes success possible even when fiscal resources are limited. Rural areas tend to have a less transient population, often resulting in children attending the same schools their parents attended. Barley and Beesley attributed this to a more trusting community-school relationship in which parents were more likely to support teachers' and principals' efforts to hold students to high standards. This bond between the community and the school was a characteristic of small rural schools that Barley and Beesley believed was not found in

non-rural small schools, such as those being created in urban districts where parents have no pre-existing relationship to the schools.

Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) found that the level of education is directly related to the economic opportunities available for rural youths. Lower educational levels are related to few economic opportunities. Bickel, Banks, and Spatig (1991) understood this scenario well. They believed that fewer rural youth aspired to a college education when the local occupational structure does not reward such educational choices. Corbett (2009) stated that rural schools often forced relocation to urban areas for the higher achieving students. These students felt more opportunities existed for them in the urban areas. However, these students often moved to urban areas without looking at opportunities available in the rural communities. Burnell (2003) stated that occupations in rural areas are generally of lower status and require less education. Often these work opportunities met rural students' expectations for a chance to stay close to home, to be a part of the community, and to make a living.

Lowe (2006) stressed that more effort should be made by school administrators to help new teachers transition to the school and to the community. Lowe pointed out that beginning teachers are not finished with their training, yet they are often left on their own to provide the same services as experienced teachers. The summer months prior to school beginning in the fall are an imperative time for schools to assist teachers in becoming accustomed to their new surroundings. Lowe suggested helping beginning teachers find housing, keeping in touch with them during the months prior to the start of school, and celebrating their arrival with a reception.

Although research on rural schools is limited, data found that community support of rural schools increased the importance of attending that school and being a teacher at that school (school attendance and jobs). The beginning teacher felt more wanted, needed, and respected in these schools. The appreciation for the beginning teacher may help compensate for the lower pay offered by rural areas with limited economic resources. However, in today's economic recession, this limited economic resource is drawing many graduates as well as potential teachers to larger, urban areas where higher paying jobs are available.

### **Student Demographics**

Although the makeup of student populations in rural schools varies, the NCES (2010) stated that 75% of all rural students were Caucasian; 10% were African American; and 11% were Hispanic. Rural schools also had a 21% poverty rate while the urban school districts had only an 18% poverty rate.

The NCTAF (2002) discussed the high number of teachers who leave high-minority schools. However, future analysis of this data showed high-minority schools had poorer working conditions, which influenced the turnover.

Sparks (2010) stated that class sizes are growing due to budget shortfalls and that the average class size is 25, but it was expected to grow as districts tried to ease budgeting problems and teacher shortages. Certo and Fox (2002) stated that teachers become frustrated when large class sizes limit their abilities to meet the needs of the individual student. In their study of Virginia teachers, class size varied from 28 to 32 students per class. Certo and Fox (2002) also pointed out that increased class sizes did not include increased funding for resources, which often limited available teacher resources

that were already lacking. Sparks (2010) reported findings of the Tennessee's Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project that showed students in smaller classes had a higher performance rate than students in regular sized classes. Statistics gathered from this study also showed poverty-stricken and minority students achieved at a significantly higher rate in smaller sized classes.

Zullig, Huebner, and Patton (2011) pointed to the school climate as a major factor in student achievement and behavior. Their study stated that students learn more productively in an orderly learning environment where teachers are committed to their students and school districts provide material support for teaching. Many teachers spend their own money to buy classroom supplies, use outdated or non-existing technology, and lack the basic necessities needed to lead a classroom.

Smaller class sizes offered teachers the opportunity to enact with students more often. Fewer students in a class also allowed the teacher an opportunity to provide more one-on-one instruction and improved both the school environment and student achievement regardless of race and economic status.

## **Discipline**

Certo and Fox (2002) stated that both novice and experienced teachers described student discipline as a problem area. The authors noted that teachers are more likely to leave the profession when discipline problems and lack of knowledge of how to handle them occur in the classroom. Landrum, Scott, and Lingo (2011) pointed out that although there are much data on behavior intervention, there is not an answer to improve student behavior.

Kukla-Acevedo (2009) explored workplace conditions that lead to teacher attrition. Student misbehavior was a negative factor in the retention of teachers. The challenge of dealing with students' poor behavior was a leading cause of stress upon teachers. However, Kukla-Acevedo found that job satisfaction increased when administrators maintained a direct involvement in helping the teacher deal with discipline problems in his or her classroom.

Riley (2004), in a case study of five Mississippi first-year teachers, found that although the five teachers reported discussions of classroom management during their core college classes, they lacked the intense training to deal with issues that appeared in their classes. Six major themes emerged from the data, three of which dealt with discipline: knowledge of how to deal with student misbehavior; concern for student learning while handling misbehavior; and understanding the local culture, particularly in the area of discipline. Another discipline issue discussed among the teachers was anger management.

Discipline is a negative factor in the retention of teachers. O'Donovan (2010) stated that new teachers must be supported by principals. Principals must realize that new teachers are vulnerable, and they should offer support, show interest, and provide encouragement.

Landrum et al. (2011) found that predictors of misbehavior exist, and when teachers are able to recognize these predictors, behavior can be improved. Fowler (2011) took these predictors a step further. She stated that a history of disciplinary referrals is the single greatest predictor of criminal behavior in adult life. A student with one or more disciplinary incidents is 23.4 times more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice

system. A student with multiple disciplinary incidents is often removed from the classroom. Fowler found that for each day a student was suspended from school, his or her chance to become a school dropout and be incarcerated increased by 0.1%.

Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-David, and Hunt (2011) found a direct link between the teachers' ability to manage the classroom and the achievements of their students. Through school observations of strong and weak teachers, Ratcliff et al. found strong teachers led the most productive classrooms by being alert and redirecting off-task behavior, using appropriate praise and rewards, and keeping students engaged in the lesson.

Britt's (1997) study of first-year teachers found many teachers were unprepared to meet the specific challenges that accompany teaching. Many exhibited frustration and stated a need for more training in the areas of preparation and planning to teach, involvement with parents, management of time wisely, and discipline issues.

### **Relationship with Administration**

Kukla-Acevedo (2009) found that increased administrative support reduced the probability of teachers leaving or switching schools. Teachers expressed the need for principals to communicate expectations and model professional behavior, resulting in a more positive school climate.

Pearson and Moomaw (2005) studied 300 Florida teachers to examine the relationship between teacher retention and teacher empowerment and professionalism. Their study found teachers were more satisfied with their jobs when they perceived that the administration asked their opinions on matters directly affecting them. Pearson and Moomaw found that these teachers also rated themselves higher as professionals.

Certo and Fox (2002) conducted a study of seven Virginia school districts. Their study showed that beginning teachers preferred an environment where they were treated as professionals at both the school level and the central office level. Teachers in the study described effective administrators as those who listened to the needs of teachers, were visible in the school and the classrooms, and provided the teachers with needed resources.

Certo and Fox (2002) also found that teachers wanted a voice in decision-making in their schools. Their findings implied that when teachers are on the ground level of decision-making, they are more productive and accepting of new ideas. Teachers often felt that central office decisions were implemented without teacher input. This made teachers feel unimportant and their opinions unvalued.

Ingersoll (2001) stated that teachers who feel in control of their classrooms are less likely to leave the profession. Teachers need to have more freedom in choosing textbooks, using different instructional strategies, and applying the grading system. This requires a strong administrator who is willing to accept input from his or her teaching staff.

The stronger the relationship between a teacher and an administrator, the higher the job satisfaction level is. Teachers want visible, involved listeners to serve as administrators. At the same time, administrators must be willing to listen to ideas from staff members and to divide responsibilities and decisions among the teachers.

### **Collaboration with Other Teachers**

Jackson and Bruegmann (2009) found that teachers with productive colleagues improved instruction and teacher satisfaction. Using longitudinal elementary school



teachers and student data, novice teachers improved their instruction by watching, emulating, and working with an effective peer instructor. Data also documented that students have larger test score gains when their teachers experience improvements in the observable characteristics of their colleagues. Ratcliff et al. (2011) agreed that future teachers and novice teachers alike would improve if they modeled their practices on observations of strong teachers. However, time allotments during the school day often prevent this type of collaboration. The NCTAF (2002) pointed out that teaching in isolated classrooms is over and that today's teachers work best in supportive learning environments. Baker et al. (2003) defined collaboration as a means of using the strengths of some teachers, compensating for the weakness of others, and improving the overall professional capacity of a school.

Grant (2006) stated that beginning teachers needed feedback to experience their successes. Once a teacher feels successful, he or she works more diligently to continue being successful. This feedback must be specific to a task and done continuously for improvement to occur. Watching successful teachers handle difficult situations also allows beginning teachers' vicarious experiences in which to learn.

Teacher development is not achieved in isolation. Beginning teachers need to be part of the learning community and to receive feedback and support from their peers, the administrators, the students, and the parents. O'Donovan (2010) stressed that orientation programs for new teachers should be put in place not at the first of school but throughout the school year to explain key issues. O'Donovan found if teachers are provided intense support in curriculum and instruction from the outset, they will become more effective sooner, improving student success and staying in the educational profession. Research

conducted by Kukla-Acevedo (2009) found that teachers need a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience to become fully effective at improving student performance. By observing strong teachers, this time could be shortened. However, O'Donovan (2010) pointed out the risk of not providing support and producing future cynical and disillusioned teachers.

Petty, Fitchett, and O'Conner (2012) stated that the success of teachers in high need high schools is directly related to collegiality. They suggested cohort hiring, which occurs when one teacher agrees to move to a high need school provided some of his or her colleagues do the same. Petty et al. (2012) stated that teachers who work well together, collaborate, and co-plan are more willing to take on the issues of a high need school.

### **Certification**

Rural schools are unique in that a small number of teachers perform the duties of many. Most rural teachers are required to be certified in more than one area, to teach a variety of ability levels in the same class, and to supervise extracurricular events at night and on the weekends. In a study by Haughey and Murphy (2001) of 528 rural teachers, teachers expressed a growing dissatisfaction with added nonteaching responsibilities (51%) and the amount of time given to teachers to prepare lessons (59%). Nonteaching responsibilities consisted of sitting with other teachers' classes, doing duty during the day, maintaining students' records, and sponsoring organizations.

When the USDE (2001) began implementing the *No Child Left Behind* act (NCLB), a highly qualified teacher was identified as a teacher who has a bachelor's degree in the core subject taught, full state certification or licensure, and proof of content

knowledge for each subject taught. Eppley (2009) affirmed that teacher quality makes a tremendous impact on student learning. Eppley claimed that when nonschool-related issues are controlled, the teacher became the best predictor of the student's success. Carey (2004) added that students in a Tennessee study who were assigned the most effective teachers for 3 years in a row performed 50% higher than students with less effective teachers. However, McMurrer (2007) disagreed with NCLB. His survey of state officials and district administrators suggested the high quality of the teacher had no impact or minimal impact on student achievement. Carey (2004) stressed that often the teachers did not realize their impact on student learning.

Hill and Barth (2004) reported that the passage of NCLB resulted in a requirement for teachers to become highly qualified. In poorer school districts, teachers are required to gain this additional certification without financial help from the school districts. These are the same districts that pay their teachers less. Many of the teachers who are required to add the extra certification have been teaching in that particular area for many years, and to avoid returning to college for the additional certification, many teachers choose to leave.

A study of first-year teachers by Britt (1997) found many first-year teachers were unprepared to meet the specific challenges that come with teaching. Many were frustrated and stated a need for more training in the areas of preparation and planning to teach, involving parents, managing time wisely, and discipline issues. Darling-Hammond (2003) stated that teachers who lack adequate initial preparation are more likely to leave the teaching profession.

Research by Eppley (2009) examined NCLB influence by examining rural schools. The uniqueness of small, rural schools is a distinct influence on the education of those students. By meeting the highly qualified status of NCLB, small schools often reduce the number of applicants for teaching positions. According to Eppley, a limited number of applicants resulted in the hiring of teachers on a content/knowledge/credential basis instead of hiring the best person for that particular school setting. Although NCLB has guaranteed the certification of the teacher in the classroom, it has not dealt with the quality of that teacher.

According to the National Center for Alternative Certification (2009), Mississippi had 1,478 persons complete an approved college teacher preparation program in 2003; another 420 persons completed an alternate route program in Mississippi. However, the same report stated that while Mississippi needed almost 3,000 teachers for the following school term, not all of those certified to teach went into the classroom. The demand for quality, educated teachers cuts into the supply of available teachers.

The NCTAF (2002) discussed data that implied better-prepared teachers stay in the field at a higher rate. Those teachers who complete a well-designed college education program stay in teaching at a significantly higher rate than those teachers who are certified through an alternative program. Alternative programs usually offer a few weeks of training without allowing any time for experiences with students. Teachers who enter the teaching profession without student teaching experience leave the profession at nearly twice the rate of those with student teaching experience.

NCLB has added to the stress on beginning teachers. Requirements for certification and meeting NCLB goals are factors in teacher turnover. Having the experience of student teaching raises the retention level of new teachers.

### **Clerical Duties**

Riley (2004) studied five first-year teachers who were graduates of Mississippi State University. The five teachers were traditional and nontraditional students, were Caucasian and African-American, and taught different grade levels. All five teachers reported being overwhelmed; excessive paperwork requiring tracking student performance on required benchmarks, preparation of lesson plans, and creation of tests took more time than anticipated. Riley reported that these teachers had not received the proper training in completing the types and amount of paperwork required of teachers.

Bartlett (2004) stated that the work demand on teachers is continually increasing. This demand on a teacher's time affects his or her family life, and it also adds to the number of teachers who become dissatisfied. In a study of 26 teachers, Bartlett found schools that added these clerical duties to the teachers' full schedule created exhausted and unsatisfied teachers. Bartlett also found that many teachers are working significantly longer hours than they are paid because they cannot effectively do their jobs within the hours given and keep up with the additional paperwork.

In areas such as special education where teacher shortages are wide spread, the addition of clerical duties has strongly impacted retention. Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, and Farmer (2011) stated that 72% of principals interviewed reported difficulty with teacher retention. These principals cited paperwork and higher salaries and/or benefits in competing districts as the main reasons for teachers leaving the schools.

## **Teacher Pay**

According to Greene and Winters (2007), the filling of teacher vacancies has nothing to do with pay. Greene and Winters claimed that in 2005, public school teachers were paid 36% more per hour than the average non-sales white-collar worker and 11% more than the average professional specialty and technical worker. Jimmerson (2003) reported that highly qualified new teachers are taking jobs in higher paying locations and leaving rural districts with a narrow choice of replacements. Jimmerson added that rural teachers earn less than other teachers in their respective states.

Reed and Busby (1985) realized this problem when they stated that the problem would continue to grow when young, qualified persons in teaching make more in other professions. They also recognized that the problem was much worse in rural areas. However, none of the suggestions that Reed and Busby made to correct the problem—teacher rewards, incentives, and/or merit pay—have been universally accepted.

Monk (2007) pointed out that teachers are often willing to work for less in more attractive settings. Therefore, many teachers are willing to accept less pay to live in a rural area. However, Monk insisted that to attract highly qualified teachers, the rural districts must have competitive salaries and working conditions similar to the more urban areas. As demand for highly qualified teachers grows, so does the allure to move to higher paying jobs. If the rural areas are to maintain teachers, they will eventually have to establish similar working conditions or find themselves staffed with less qualified teachers and faced with a retention problem. Rural schools must become more competitive in order to eliminate teacher turnover.

Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) concluded that an increase in pay for teachers would be too expensive for school districts and would be ineffective. They suggested that the best way to improve the quality of teachers is not through pay but through other incentives such as lower requirements for teacher licensure or career advancement based on teacher performance. Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) also added that little proof exists stating that more highly paid teachers are more effective.

Craig (2006) agreed that money was not the problem. For most teachers, motivation for a career in education came from seeing children grow up to be active, participating social beings. Bartlett (2007) described teachers as professionals who rely on intrinsic motivations. Many teachers, according to Bartlett, found personal satisfaction serving students and teaching according to their ideals.

Murnane and Steele (2007) disagreed. They insisted that the quantity of teachers supplied is equal to the amount the district is willing to pay. Murnane and Steele (2007) argued that many students look at wages before determining their college major. Often the field of education is overlooked based solely on the wages.

Although salaries are a major concern for all workers, the literature is inconsistent concerning the connection between higher paying salaries and teacher retention. The literature is also inconsistent concerning what motivates individuals to choose a career in education. Although wealthier districts offer a more attractive salary for beginning teachers, new teachers who are satisfied with the working conditions surrounding their jobs are not lured away from school districts. Pay does not seem to affect the quality of the teacher.

## **State-Mandated Testing**

Due in part to NCLB's requirement that all students score proficient by 2014, schools have placed increasing demands on teachers to obtain high student scores on the state-mandated tests. However, Beck and Shoffstall (2005) pointed out that 80% of the variance between school scores are derived from poverty, race, and family mobility. Yet those schools with higher achieving students receive public recognition and waivers of federal mandates. By reevaluating scores with variances for poverty, race, and mobility removed, Beck and Shoffstall (2005) found that the rural/small schools performed above neighboring urban schools. They also argued that schools not be rewarded based on wealth and race. Yet, state-mandated tests ignore this by not eliminating those variances the school cannot control.

Pedulla (2003) evaluated data from surveys sent to 12,000 public school teachers in grades 2–12 in 47 states. Responses from teachers implied that state-mandated tests had a narrowing effect on what was taught in the classroom. For example, many students are graduating from high school without reading any or only reading a limited amount of classic literature because literature is not on the state-mandated test. Other areas, such as fine arts, were limited because of the amount of time spent on material tested. Teachers stated that to bring students to the level of the test, teachers often used teaching methods they did not consider the best. Teachers found they were giving more lectured notes and less hands-on activities.

Hill and Barth (2004) reported complaints from teachers that they are graded by the consequences of one test, given on 1 day, without considering any other measures of



success. Hill and Barth insisted that other measures, along with the state-mandated test, should be part of a formula to assess student progress and teacher effectiveness.

Baker et al. (2003) insisted that there is no perfect way to evaluate teachers, but they pointed out districts that dismiss a teacher based solely on students' test scores can be sued in a court of law. Baker et al. stated that some states are adding test scores to teacher evaluation plans. This gives a disadvantage to teachers of tested classes when kindergarten, first grade, and second grade are not tested. Likewise, not all high school classes are tested. Baker et al. added that the state-mandated tests were not designed to evaluate teachers.

State-mandated tests also cause added stress to beginning teachers. Baker et al. (2003) stated some principals purposefully assign students with the greatest difficulties to inexperienced teachers. This results in those teachers appearing less effective. Teachers' effectiveness can be compared only when students are not placed in certain classes based on achievement, and that is seldom done.

According to Baker et al. (2003) the pressure to raise student achievement scores has destroyed teacher morale and caused teachers to leave the profession. If teacher evaluation is tied to state test scores, retention of teachers in low performing schools may escalate.

### **Summary**

A stronger bond often exists between teachers, students, and the community in rural areas. However, the literature indicated a lower level of education is directly related to the fewer economic opportunities available to the rural youth. These economic opportunities often affect the teacher as well. Talented novice teachers are often recruited

by larger urban districts. As new teachers are trained and develop, they are often sought by urban areas, leaving the rural schools.

Working conditions also play a critical part of job satisfaction and the retention of new teachers. Smaller school districts are often forced to increase class sizes; without extra resources to meet the needs of larger class sizes, teachers often become frustrated. Larger class sizes also lead to more discipline problems. Without resources available to assist teachers in observing high-quality classroom management or taking courses in classroom management, many teachers become overwhelmed.

Teachers must feel prepared for their roles as educators. They need the opportunity and support to develop and become highly qualified instructors. A strong teacher/administration relationship is instrumental in retaining novice teachers. Maintaining a productive teaching staff is also important in retaining teachers. The literature concurred that teachers improve their instruction by watching, emulating, and working with effective teachers.

The literature also concurs that pay is not the main reason for entering the teaching profession. The role is a more intrinsic motivated career. Teachers strive to improve their students but often find state-mandated testing hampers their instructional strategies. Achieving higher test scores becomes more of an issue as states incorporate students' achievement scores into the teachers' evaluations.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN

Included in this chapter is a discussion of the research design, research question, site of the study, participants, and data collection procedures used. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data analysis procedures used.

#### **Research Design**

A case study approach was the research design used to research teacher turnover in the LMSD. Merriam (2002) described this type of research as a methodology that offers “a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (p. 41). Within the LMSD are seven different campuses. Each campus has different student demographics and settings. Thus, the use of a case study approach was best suited for this research.

Patton (2002) stated that the qualitative approach supports research dealing with people’s experiences and their interpretation of those experiences. Patton also stated that case studies are the most appropriate research method when too little information is available to create standardized instruments. Although the LMSD has been aware of the turnover in new teachers within the district, no data were available to the district on why this turnover has occurred.

According to Soy (1997), a case study is appropriate to examine a real-life situation and provide the basis for the application of ideas. Therefore, a case study could be helpful in analyzing data from teachers who have chosen to leave the LSMD.

Merriam (2002) stated that one of the strengths of qualitative research is that researchers become more involved with the data collection and this interaction with the “human instrument” (p. 5) makes the research valuable. Topics are used instead of specific questions in order to develop more conversation with the participants. Hatch (2002) suggested participants are more relaxed and feel less threatened by the interview process when asked to discuss a general topic instead of answering specific questions.

In this study, all participants were given a list of topics that would be discussed in the interview session prior to meeting. This allowed the participants to gather their thoughts and arrive at the interview more prepared.

### **Research Site**

All research was gathered from the LSMD in Tiny County, Mississippi. The county is rurally located in east central Mississippi. The county named after Attorney Linville Tiny has about 610 square miles of land with a ratio of about 32 persons per square mile. According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2011), just over 19,000 persons live in the county. The county is about 52% Caucasian, 46% African American, 1% Native American, and 1% other.

A per capita personal income of about \$17,250 per year existed in 2010, placing 25% below the poverty level. About 80% own a home. Of those residents 25 or older, some 78% are high school graduates. About 20% hold a bachelor’s degree or higher.

The county is the site of an ancient mound built by the American Indians in the 17th century. Once a state park, the mound was returned to local American Indians in 2008 by the state of Mississippi. The county is also the start of the Diamond River.

### **Participants**

Participants for the study were teachers who left LMSD after 1 to 3 years. Principals of the schools and the superintendent were also included as participants.

These teachers and principals were from the five city campuses as well as the two county campuses. According to data provided by the district, 250 teachers are employed annually. Of this number, the district has lost approximately 20 teachers over the past 3 years to retirement and 12 teachers for other documented reasons including relocation of the family or illness. Also, 30 certified staff members have left the district during the past 3 years without any documented reason. Altogether, the district loses approximately a fourth of the staff annually.

Of the 30 certified staff members who left without a reason, 93% had 3 or fewer years experience in education. Each teacher who left the district was contacted. The LMSD provided a list of teachers that left the LMSD after 1 to 3 years. Using a set group of topics, data were gathered from these teachers through interviews.

The LMSD principals were also interviewed. Of the principals, three were high school graduates of this district, and four live in the district. All have been principals in this district for more than 3 years.

I was also a participant in this study. I am a native of this county; I attended elementary and high school in this district, worked as a teacher for 25 years in the district, served as principal of one of the county attendance centers, retired, and returned part-time

as a teacher of the Advanced Placement Literature and Composition course and an administrator of Tiny High School ninth- and tenth-grade English teachers (see resume in Appendix A). My knowledge of this school district played a vital role in the analysis of data.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

All possible participants were mailed a letter requesting their participation and the best time to contact them (see Appendix B). Upon receiving a response from these teachers, interview times and places were set, and each participant was sent a list of topics to be discussed during the interviews (see Appendix C).

A second letter of request was sent to those teachers who had not responded to the previous letter. Phone calls were also made to those with available numbers in an attempt to increase the number of participants.

Interviews were conducted concerning the teachers' reasons for leaving the district. An interview protocol was used (see Appendix C). All face-to-face sessions were tape recorded. All participation in the study was completely voluntary.

Some of these participants were close enough to the LMSD area that they were visited in their own homes or a common area, such as the county library. However, others lived away from the area and were contacted either through phone or e-mail. I conducted all interviews. All phone interviews followed the same protocol. If the interview was conducted via e-mail, a copy of the correspondence was kept. All data were treated as confidential, and no identifying information was used.

The LMSD superintendent and the principals of each school were also interviewed. A list of interview topics for administrators was used (see Appendix D).

This list of topics was sent to these participants prior to the interview. The superintendent and each principal were contacted for an appointment. Each interview was conducted in school offices. All interviews were tape recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher contacted each name given, which was a teacher who taught as a beginning teacher in the LMSD and left after teaching three or fewer years (see Appendix C). Once contacted, each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The perceptions of the teachers and the administrators were essential in determining the variables that influence teacher turnover in the LMSD.

Once interview data were collected from teachers, the data were analyzed for similarities and/or differences in the participants' answers. Tables were created showing areas that influenced teachers' decisions in leaving the district. Similar tables were created from the data collected from the interviews with the principals. A similar comparison was drawn with perception of the teachers and the perception of the administration. By using the constant comparison method of analysis to organize the data categories, as explained by Patton (2002), the researcher conceptualized the process of ongoing category refinement that ultimately led to the conclusion of this study. Participants' answers to common questions were compared and analyzed for different perspectives on central issues. Categories, created from the data, become the basis for the organization and conceptualization of that data. These categories were used to answer the first research question: Why are teachers leaving the LMSD after 3 or fewer years of teaching?

At this point, the researcher looked at the conclusions drawn by Veenman (1984), Ganser (1999), and Ingersoll (2001). Similarities and differences appeared. By analyzing data from these studies and the data from the present study, the second and third research questions were answered:

What can the LMSD do in order to provide a more stable workforce?

How can the retention rate of new teachers be increased?

### **Trustworthiness**

Validity deals with whether the researcher reports what is supposed to be reported. Creswell (2003) referred to this as verification. Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that validity refers not to the data but to the inferences drawn from them. They stressed the importance of checking to make sure the participants' realities have been accurately recorded and perceived. To assure validity in this study, triangulation of data was used. Each participant was asked similar questions, and data convergence among the different sources formed categories in the study. All participants volunteered for this research, and each was assured of confidentiality.

Participants knew the researcher prior to the interviews. The participants trusted the researcher to keep information confidential. To the best of my knowledge, the participants gave honest answers to the questions.

To Merriam (1998), internal validity is consistency of the research findings with reality, which she defined as multidimensional and ever-changing. Merriam (1998) supported triangulation of data to provide plausible explanations of the study.

This study enhanced validity and reliability through the use of multiple sources of data of many teachers and administrators. Miles and Huberman (1994) advocated the



use of multiple sampling to strengthen validity and added confidence to findings. The descriptions of the experiences of teachers who left LMSD added to trustworthiness of the research. Additionally, credibility and dependability were established through the use of the words of these teachers.

Merriam (1998), Miles and Hubermann (1994), and Yin (1994) supported the use of multiple cases and cross-case procedures as ways to establish a trustworthiness of the findings of the study. To Miles and Hubermann (1994), the process of triangulating data enhances findings through the examination of multiple sources and the process of comparing findings from one study with the findings of other studies. In the research presented in this study, not only were findings from individual teachers compared with each other but also findings from this research were compared with the findings of other research.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter begins with the demographics for each of the seven schools in the LMSD. Participants in this study are discussed individually. Their reasons for leaving LMSD are also discussed and compared to findings of Veenman (1984), Ganser (1999), and Ingersoll (2001), the leading researchers of this topic.

#### **Description of LMSD**

The LSMD (see Appendix E) is comprised of six separate campuses that accommodate almost 3,000 students. A vocational center serves all high school students, and it is located on the campus of the city high school. LMSD has a 69.5% graduation rate (Local School Directory, 2010).

Each school has a principal and an assistant principal. LMSD is administered by one school board and one superintendent. School board members are elected, and the school board appoints the superintendent.

The schools are spread across the county; some are positioned close to each other while others are 20 miles apart. All schools are Title I schools with 78.45% of the students receiving free or reduced lunches. Originally, Tiny County had four separate school districts: School A, School B, School C, and School D. In the 1960s, School B and School A's districts joined the School C district. However, School B and School A kept

all grades on their individual campuses. In 1970, School D joined the district and became the Junior High School for the city schools.

At the time of this study, the Mississippi Department of Education recognized schools based on five ratings: superior-performing schools, exemplary schools, successful schools, under-performing schools, and low-performing schools. The performance classification assigned to a school is determined by (a) the percentage of students at the school who perform at criterion levels (basic and proficient) and (b) the degree to which student performance has improved over time (based on an expected growth value for the school). The results from the Achievement Model and the Growth Model are combined to assign each school a school rating (Mississippi, 2011). All schools in Tiny County received the “successful” rating except School A Attendance Center, which was rated “exemplary,” and the city high school, which was rated as “underperforming.”

According to the LMSD Payroll Administrator (personal communication, April 10, 2011), LMSD employs 434 people (see Table 1). Almost half of the employees are teachers (223).

Each of the seven schools differs in location, number of teachers and staff employed, and racial composition. School A and School B are attendance centers. Attendance centers contain grades kindergarten through 12th on one campus. Table 2 presents a demographic breakdown of each school.

School E is located on North Church Avenue in Little, MS, and it is the largest in student numbers. School E houses a total of 576 pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first-

grade, and second-grade students. School E is a Title I school with 90 % of the students receiving free or reduced lunches.

Located across the street from School E is School H, which has 522 third-, fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. School H is also a Title I school with 93% of the students receiving free or reduced lunches. The 2010 Mississippi report card lists this school as “successful,” an improvement from the previous 2 years.

School D Junior High, located on Mississippi Avenue in Little, MS, is also a Title I school with 81% of the students receiving free or reduced lunches. The 2010 Mississippi state report card lists this school as “successful,” an advancement from the 2009 ratings. School D has 339 seventh- and eighth-grade students.

School F, located on Ivy Avenue in Little, MS, contains ninth-, 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-grade students. School F is a Title I school with 78% of the students receiving free or reduced lunches. The 2010 Mississippi report card lists this school as “academic watch,” a decline from the prior year. In 2010–2011, 616 students attended School F. This school has become the center for all Advanced Placement classes and vocational classes, busing students from the two other attendance centers.

School B Attendance Center is located seven miles from Little. School B houses 428 students ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade. Another Title I school, School B has 85.44% of students receiving free or reduced lunches. This school is rated “successful,” an increase from the previous year, by the 2010 Mississippi report card.

School A, located 20 miles from Little, is in the community of Potato, MS, and serves 484 students in kindergarten to 12th grade. For the 2010–2011 school year, School A is rated “highly successful,” the highest of the county schools by the 2010 Mississippi

report card. The school has maintained this rating for the past 5 years. 55% of the students at School A receive free or reduced lunches.

Located on the campus with School F, the Little County Career Technology Center (LCTC) serves the three public high schools in the LMSD (School A, School B, and Little) and Tiny County's two private schools (Private Academy and Christian Academy). Nine different career courses are offered.

### **Hiring Procedure**

According to the LMSD superintendent, Henry Hemp, (personal communication, May 6, 2009) the district is continually looking for highly qualified teachers to fill vacancies. School board policy states that full-time teachers must notify the superintendent or local principal as soon as they decide not to return to their current teaching positions for the following year. In March, all teachers are asked to sign letters of intent to signify whether they intend to return to their position. However, these intent forms are not legally binding. By April 15, teachers are notified whether they will have a contract for the following school year. Before the end of May, teachers receive a contract for the new school year. The contract is a legally binding agreement; however, according to the superintendent, many new teachers have broken their contracts and left their teaching positions.

As several teachers have left the district during the school year, the school board found it necessary to stress the consequences of breaking a contract. A policy was added to the district policies and procedures. According to this policy, the district requested the Mississippi Department of Education hold the teaching license for 1 calendar year of any teacher who leaves during the school term. Often this year will affect the teacher for 2

years depending upon the time of year he or she left the district. For example, if a teacher breaks his or her contract in October 2010 and the district holds the contract for 1 calendar year, that teacher will not be eligible to teach until October 2011. Districts do not typically hire at this point of the semester, and the teacher may have to wait until August 2012.

According to Kent Mulligan, assistant superintendent, (personal communication, May 6, 2009) breaking contracts have forced the district to replace teachers during the school year. By the beginning of a school term, highly qualified teachers generally have contracts. The assistant superintendent stated, "Finding qualified, experienced, and dedicated teachers at these times are often nearly impossible. Persons hired during the school year are often the only available applicant." He acknowledged that this is not always the best situation for the students, but it may be the only solution to the problem.

### **Participants**

According to data provided by LMSD, 223 certified staff members were employed during the 2008–2009 school year. Of the 223 staff members, 40 teachers left LMSD during or by the end of the 2008–2009 school year, a lower turnover rate than usual. Of these 40 teachers, 25 (62.5%) had 3 years of experience or less. Each of these 25 teachers was contacted (see Appendix C). Ten of the contacted teachers had moved without leaving a current address, and six did not want to participate. Nine former teachers participated in this research. Of the nine participants, five are females, and four are males. Five received their licenses through a regular certification at a college of education. Four chose education after completing college in another area other than

education; these four attended an alternative program to receive licensure. All nine taught in the area of their certification (see Table 3 for teacher participant demographics).

### **Demographics of Participants**

#### **Participant 1**

Participant 1 is Ann, a 33-year-old Caucasian female. Ann accepted a teaching position at School F directly from college. She graduated in the field of education. She taught a tested secondary area at School F. Ann was very bitter about her time at School F, blaming the administration for not controlling students. She placed all problems on administrators whom she felt had not given her ample support. The principal, however, stated that Ann had no classroom control and needed continuous supervision in her classroom to manage students. The principal stated that during the majority of the day, either an aide or a special education teacher was assigned to be in Ann's classroom in an attempt to keep order. Ann admitted students were often loud and unruly, but placing all blame on the administration, she stated, "He [the principal] said I should take control of the class, but he didn't have any ideas on how to do it. When I sent a student to the office, he sent them right back to me." Both Ann and the principal agreed that her classroom environment was more conducive to learning with an aide or special education teacher in the classroom. Ann contributed this to the fact that the administration supported those teachers instead of her. "The students knew if she [the other teacher in the room] sent one of them out of the class, they would be punished," added Ann. She did not see this intervention by the principal as support nor did she see the other teacher as the disciplinarian of her classroom.

When Ann submitted her intent letter to the administration for her second year of teaching, she stated she would not be returning. She did not give a reason in the letter for leaving. She did not foresee another contract being offered, and she realized she could not be a successful teacher by returning to the same situation as the previous year.

After leaving LMSD, she found employment as a teacher in another school district. According to Ann, she is successful at this school, and she was more positive in her attitude when speaking of her new position. She described her new employment as “a wonderful place to teach.” She continued by saying, “Everyone is so helpful. The kids actually want to learn. The principal comes by on a regular basis to check to see if I need anything. This principal is more involved with the students.” However, the principal of her new school was not contacted. At this point, I am not sure if the principal visits to strengthen her weak classroom management skills or if the principal is more visible in the building.

## **Participant 2**

Bill, participant 2, is a 27-year-old Caucasian male. Bill replaced a retiring teacher who taught a tested secondary area at School A Attendance Center. He was given the teacher’s same schedule including the tested subject area. He completed an alternative path to teaching. Originally, Bill intended to seek work in the private sector; however, because of the decline of the job market in his expertise, he tried teaching. School A was his first teaching experience. His original degree offered him the hours necessary to teach the subject matter. Reluctantly, Bill admitted that he did not enjoy teaching school. He liked having weekends and holidays with no obligations. He enjoyed ending his day early enough to “have a life.” When asked about class preparation, Bill avoided the question. “I



always can teach the next lesson. Those kids are slow.” Bill also felt that he was wasting his talents in education and could make more money in another field. He was from the local area, but he did not want to stay in the School A community. Bill felt the community lacked nonrelated-school activities for a single person. “When you are from a small community, everyone is in your business,” he stated. The principal stated, “Bill lacks the desire to teach. His lessons are weak. A sub cannot follow his weekly plans. Bill sees no reason to improve from his current teaching method.”

According to the principal, Bill would have been offered another contract, but he would have been placed on a plan of improvement. However, Bill chose not to renew his contract. After leaving LMSD, Bill returned to graduate school in his previously chosen field. According to Bill, he has done well in graduate school and enjoys returning to a college town.

When asked whether he would consider teaching again, Bill grinned, “I might, but it would be a last resort. I am enjoying my life right now.”

### **Participant 3**

Curtis is a 31-year-old African American male. Curtis taught in a tested elementary area at School D Middle School. He is a college graduate in the field of Elementary Education. Curtis was disappointed with the opportunities for advancing in the school. “The only teachers that I have seen advance have been veteran teachers or athletic coaches,” he states. He had not planned a career in a class setting; he wanted to advance quickly to an administrative position. According to his principal, Curtis had the potential to be an administrator, but he lacked the patience for the opportunity. In the interview, Curtis questioned the wait period and the financial strain of additional college

hours to complete his administrative license. He wanted assistance from the district, and this district does not assist teachers seeking administrative licensure. He continually stated that his principal asked his opinion, assigned him the more difficult duty spots, and regarded him as a peer. Curtis did not see the need for additional college classes.

Although Curtis's principal tried to persuade him to stay in the school system, Curtis chose not to renew his contract. After leaving LMSD, Curtis secured employment in the private sector as a manager for a hardware chain. He states that he enjoys a higher salary and the ability to advance based on his abilities.

#### **Participant 4**

Participant 4 is Donna, a first-year teacher. Donna is a 33-year-old Caucasian female. Donna taught in a tested secondary area at School F. She completed an alternative path to teaching. Donna's original degree was in environmental science. Donna is single and originally from Tiny County. She wanted to be closer to her family, and her previous job did not allow this. She required a steady job in order to relocate, and her mother was a retired teacher and suggested education.

The school's lack of resources, such as materials and supplies, frustrated Donna. She stated, "When I entered my classroom for the first day, there were a teacher's desk and chair, 25 student desks, and a garbage can. There were no supplies in the desk and none available." According to Donna, all supplies and materials needed to create a quality classroom environment should be made readily available. Donna did not like that she had to acquire ideas, teaching supplies, and supplementary materials on her own. "I knew teachers' salaries were not the highest in Mississippi, but I did not realize that I would be spending my own money for materials for my classroom," she stated. "The

small amount of funds the district did offer when class began did not furnish me ink for the computer for an entire year,” she added.

Besides classroom supplies, Donna also complained about out-dated textbooks and resources in her room. “I spend hours every week hunting for additional information to make sure my students get up-to-date materials. School F should provide this for me.”

Her principal described Donna as having great potential, stating she knew the material but lacked the strategies for getting material across to students. Her research experience allowed her the knowledge for hands-on activities enjoyed by students. The principal felt that had Donna stayed in education, she would have become a much better teacher.

After leaving LMSD, Donna returned to her prior employment in research at a local university and enrolled in graduate school. Recently, Donna received her PhD in this field.

### **Participant 5**

Ellen is a 26-year-old Caucasian female. Ellen taught in a non-tested secondary area at School E. She is a first-year teacher with a college degree in the field of education. Ellen enjoyed her employment with LMSD, but she relocated due to her husband’s job. Ellen was very complementary of the district, the local administrators, and her colleagues. She stated, “The people I worked with were like mentors to me. Everyone helped me with difficult situations, shared materials, and offered me advice. I will miss my students, my fellow teachers, and the administrators at Little Elementary.” She displayed genuine affection for the district.

Ellen's principal was equally satisfied with Ellen's teaching ability, stating, "I wish I had more teachers like Ellen. She worked well with both the students and her peers." The principal considered moving Ellen to a tested area had she stayed at LMSD. "Her ability to reach her students would have been a great asset."

When asked why Ellen was a high-quality teacher, the principal stated, "She is organized and has a well-managed classroom. Kids like order. She is creative and develops teaching strategies to reach even the lowest child in her class." The principal added that many first year teachers teach something once and hope that every child understands.

After leaving LMSD, Ellen quickly found employment as a teacher in another school district. Her principal stated her desire to find more teachers like Ellen and added, "I wish I could have helped her husband find a job here so they would have stayed."

### **Participant 6**

Frank is a 26-year-old Caucasian male who began his teaching career at LMSD. Frank taught in a non-tested secondary and elementary area at School F and School E. He is a college graduate in the field of physical education. Frank left the LMSD, so he could be closer to his family. Frank and his wife recently had their first child. Since both he and his wife worked, he wanted family closer to help with the new baby.

He was not unhappy at LMSD; however, he disliked travelling from one school to another. Frank's job required spending three class periods each morning at School E and three class periods every afternoon at School F. The class period between served as his travel period and planning period. He stated he never felt as if he belonged at either school. "I enjoyed my students, but I only knew the teachers with rooms close to me.

Most of the teachers I could not call by name.” Also, by the time he collected materials in the morning classes, traveled to School F, and organized materials for afternoon classes, he never had any planning time. All work for planning the next day’s classes was completed at home. “I even had a personal copier at home so I could run off any material I need,” he stated. “A great deal of my work was done at home. My wife often helped grade papers and type review sheets or tests. Now, we both need that time at home with the baby.”

When asked how this travel affected his classroom teaching, he said, “Teaching in two different locations teaches you to be organized for sure. However, I think if I had been at one school only, I could become more involved with my students and know what was happening in their lives. I’ve heard that some teachers teach the same subject and grade level all day. I think that would have been wonderful.” He laughed and added, “I’d have the lesson perfect by the end of the day.”

The two principals corroborated Frank’s comments. Both stated that they did not know Frank as well as other teachers on their staffs. Each made the same comment: “He is not really my teacher but belongs on [they named the other school] staff.”

After leaving LMSD, Frank found employment as a teacher in another school district where he worked in one location. This school was also within 40 miles of his parent’s home. According to Frank, the new situation has worked out much better.

### **Participant 7**

Glenda is a 31-year-old African American female. Glenda taught in a tested elementary area at School D Middle School. Glenda completed a 4-year degree in a health-care field. She had hoped to teach in the health-care field in a teaching hospital.

However, an opportunity never availed itself. When she found an opportunity to teach secondary school, she was eager to try teaching. She completed an alternative path to teaching program.

School D Middle School was Glenda's first teaching experience. Glenda replaced a teacher who was teaching a tested area, and she was given the previous teacher's schedule. When asked why Glenda was assigned a tested area, the principal commented, "Teachers don't like to change. I lost that teacher. The replacement had to pick it up."

Glenda was insistent that education was for her, but she lacked the knowledge to reach her students. "I love teaching!" Glenda stressed. "I always thought I would enjoy teaching, but I envisioned myself teaching adults. This is my spot. I feel the elementary kids really need me."

Glenda's principal stated: "Glenda is a wonderful teacher. She has the patience and ability to be a great teacher," he added. He also insisted that he would rehire Glenda, if the opportunity were available, when she completes more college work.

When asked why she returned to graduate school, she stated, "I have students who can't read and I do not know how to help them. I feel I can be a better teacher if I had more educational training." Responding to the question of finding the help she needed among teachers on campus, she said, "Maybe. Everyone is always helpful, but I just feel that I need to do something more."

Glenda did not accept a contract at the end of the year; she returned to graduate school in education with plans to eventually return to the classroom. She enjoyed her graduate courses, and she was working diligently to add to her resources for future years.

## **Participant 8**

Helen is a 27-year-old Caucasian female. She is a college graduate in the field of education. Helen taught in a tested secondary area at School F. Principals filled empty positions. They responded as if they did not have a sense of choice in the placement. One principal stated, “My older teachers would revolt if I gave them the tested classes. They feel they have earned the right to teach the upper classes which have fewer discipline problems and are usually not tested.”

Helen was not troubled by the fact that she had a tested class. When questioned, she merely shrugged her shoulders. She was much more defensive about her relationships with her students. Helen did not connect with her students and blamed this on administration not wanting her cultivating friendships with students. Her administrator agreed. Helen added, “I had those teachers in high school who were domineering and overbearing. I promised myself that if I ever became a teacher, I would be a friend and a confidant of my students.” “That was her problem,” insisted her principal. “Helen wanted to be a friend when the students needed a leader and a teacher.” When questioned about her relationship with students, Helen admitted she talked often to students on the phone and on Facebook. She also invited students to her home. “There is nothing wrong with being a friend,” she adamantly insisted.

The administration described Helen’s classroom as a poor environment for education. Excessive discipline problems interrupted valued educational time. Her principal stated, “She had favorites and the other students knew it.”

Helen was not offered another contract at the end of her first teaching year. After leaving LMSD, Helen found employment as a teacher in a small private school. She is

satisfied with her current position, and according to Helen, the new school promotes closeness with students and their parents. Helen contends she is friends with all her students, and it has caused no problems.

### **Participant 9**

Ivan is a 55-year-old Caucasian male. Ivan retired from the military and completed an alternative path to teaching program. During his military career, Ivan worked as an engineer. Ivan admitted that he thought the classroom and the military were similar until he actually took a job in education. Ivan taught in a tested secondary area. According to his principal, Ivan lacked the flexibility that was needed when working in a school. Ivan agreed, stating, “I am accustomed to telling someone to do something and it being done. I follow a clock. Here, anything can disrupt class for no apparent reason – fire drills, unannounced assemblies, school pictures, or thousands of little things.” He felt his experience at LMSD would be beneficial for his future but that he needed a fresh start. “It isn’t the school’s fault. I realize that I need to remember I am no longer an officer in the military. I must relax.” The principal stated that students respected Ivan, and he had no discipline problems in his classroom.

Although the school system offered Ivan another contract, Ivan found employment as a teacher in an adjacent district. His principal stated, “I would rehire Ivan if I had a vacancy and he wanted to return to this school. I am sure his second year of teaching is going better as he adjusts to an educational career.”

In a follow-up phone call with Ivan, he stated that he was adjusting better to the school environment. “I try not to be so rigid in my classes,” he said. “It isn’t easy to change the way you have functioned for the past thirty years,” he added.



### **Models Used With Data Analysis**

Although Ganser's (1999) and Veenman's (1984) studies are interesting, their data seem no longer current. Also, participants in their studies were not restricted to beginning teachers. However, any study dealing with teacher retention recognized Ganser's and Veenman's work as the starting points for comparisons.

When Veenman (1984) conducted his original study of problems with beginning teachers in the Netherlands, many looked upon his work as the identification of problems that could be used across the world (see Table 3). However, Ganser (1999) found that specifics did not coincide with American schools (see Table 4). As discussed in the earlier literature review, the outcomes were very different.

Both Veenman (1984) and Ganser (1999) used a survey to obtain their data. As data were gathered for this research, similar questions were orally discussed during the interviews with the nine participants.

Veenman's (1984) survey found that classroom discipline was a main problem for beginning teachers and tenured teachers alike. The teachers stated that differentiating the lessons to accommodate the individual differences for students was difficult. This lack of reaching all students added to the classroom discipline problem and to the ability to motivate their students. Apathy seemed to be a problem with students. This apathy also affected the teachers who said they lacked time to organize class work. Also related to discipline and motivation was reason five that stated teachers could not deal with the individual student's problems. In a classroom of 25 students, the teachers found that each student had a different problem. Basically, Veenman's (1984) study placed the problems with the students.

Ganser's (1999) survey dealt more with the teachers' opinions concerning the job requirements rather than the actual teaching of the students. Teachers felt they did not have time to relax. Their spare time was spent doing school business. Clerical work and lack of preparation time for the classroom were serious issues for teachers. Teachers complained of larger classes and less time to prepare. The only similarity between Ganser's (1999) and Veenman's (1984) surveys dealt with the issue of discipline.

Ingersoll and Strong (2012) stated that teaching lacked the kind of support, guidance, and orientation programs needed for beginning teachers. Ingersoll and Strong asserted teacher retention was caused by a lack of adequate support from school administration, insufficient teacher preparation prior to employment, and an environment that did not foster teacher growth. Ingersoll (2003) listed lack of support from the school administration, student discipline problems, poor student motivation, and the lack of input into school-wide classroom decisions.

### **Research Findings**

Although participants were asked similar questions used in Veenman's (1984), Ganser's (1999), and Ingersoll's (2001) research, this study included financial concerns of students and teachers, setting of smaller schools, the requirements of federal mandates including being highly qualified, high-stake testing, and working conditions. These topics were more current as developed through the literature review and provided additional insight into the problem of beginning teachers' leaving their positions.

Responses were ranked by the number of participants that commented on each area as a reason for leaving or a problem while teaching. The most often problem area for all nine participants became reason one. Several areas had an equal number of responses.

These top responses became the top eight reasons for leaving this district. See Table 5 for order of responses.

After comparing responses from the participants in this study, the top eight reasons for leaving LMSD were determined (see Table 5). This research shows discipline (number 7) and motivation (number 2) of students as problem areas. This compares to Veenman's previous study. Heavy teaching loads resulting in insufficient prep time (number 2) is similar to Ganser's earlier findings. However, participants added that pressure of state-mandated testing (number 1) is another reason for leaving.

### **Pressure to Achieve Higher Test Scores**

The participants indicated that too much emphasis was placed on state testing. "I wasn't expected to teach a subject area," claimed Ann. "I was only required to cover material on the test." "I prefer to teach the subject my way," stated Donna. "They [the school district] kept sending in people to tell me how to teach. I don't think they know how themselves." Donna's referenced consultants hired by the district to raise test scores. Testing was also connected with participants' time management issues. "This district tests too much," insisted Donna. "Students get test weary from all of it and it takes away time needed for real instruction." According to a LMSD central office person, LMSD requires testing at the beginning of each school year to develop a baseline for evaluation of student progress. Testing is then repeated during the school year and before the state-mandated tests. This type of testing is designed to determine weak students who may need additional help before the state-mandated tests. "I already know who is weak in my room," claimed Glenda. "Why can't they just take my word?" A very sarcastic Donna

added, “Everyone knows Mississippi is on the bottom of educational surveys. Leave us there and forget all these tests.”

When asked if they believed that they covered content adequately, those in a tested area were negative. Frank stated, “I covered the material the state indicated would be tested, but I left out a lot of material that will be needed later on in life.” Ivan said, “I covered the material that the students needed for the test, but I wish I had had the time and liberty to add to it. I think it would have made class more interesting to the students.” Ann claimed, “The district didn’t care what I did in class as long as my students scored proficient or advanced. Nothing else mattered.”

According to one principal, this is not true. “We insist that the material that will be tested be covered prior to the test; however, teachers may use any additional time to add to their classroom instructions. Most teachers do this at the end of the year after the testing.” Ivan laughed at this concept. “My students are mentally tired after a week of testing. I do add material after the test. We watched several good historically correct movies. However, I would have preferred adding material when I was at that point in my history lesson.”

### **Motivating Students**

Motivating students was a problem the teachers also faced in both Veenman’s (1984) and Ingersoll’s (2001) research. Bill stated, “The kids don’t want to learn. How can I motivate someone who doesn’t care what I say or do to them?” A frustrated Ellen commented, “No one can show me how to motivate my students. I’ve researched the issue but only come up with teaching strategies that do not motivate these students. I hope I can find the answer to how to motivate students when I take education classes.”

Ivan added, “In the military every recruit had to be motivated to be successful. Those that could not meet the grade received a dishonorable discharge. Maybe education needs to discharge the students who don’t want to learn.”

### **Insufficient Materials and Supplies**

Another similarity to Ganser’s (1999) study related to insufficient materials and supplies. “I thought the schools would have more technology than they did,” points out Ivan. “I ended up bringing my personal equipment to school.” Curtis pointed to the lack of materials: “I had to buy ink for my computer printer from my own pocketbook.” Ann claimed the technology was not as important as the supplies that were not available, saying, “I needed more books, current maps, and a pencil sharpener. I had to make do all year.” When asked why their requests were not purchased, most had no answer. Donna noted the fact that she was told no money was available. “We [each teacher] were given \$157 for classroom supplies. When you need everything, that [\$157] doesn’t go very far!” When asked if the economy of this county hurt the students’ ability to buy supplies for class or projects, Frank said, “Supplies for class? That is a joke! These students have money for the things they want. Those that want to have the supplies do; those that don’t want to do the work don’t.” Curtis commented, “I brought paper, pens, pencils, notebooks, and lots of other supplies to class with me. Some still would not use it.”

### **Insufficient Prep Time**

Participants connected a heavy teaching load resulting in insufficient prep time, lack of spare time, and high emphasis on state testing. “I just can’t get everything done,” stated Frank. “They [college courses] didn’t stress the paperwork was worst when you

have your own classroom. I carry it home and bring it back every day hoping to find time to work on it at home, but I never do.” When asked about the preparation period given to all teachers, many of the participants laughed. They described their preparation period as a farce. Descriptions include “a long restroom break,” “a copy period,” or “my turn to be somebody’s substitute because the district is low on funds and cannot afford substitute teachers.”

When asked what would improve this situation, the answers varied. Ann suggested more prep time and fewer classes for beginning teachers. Glenda stated a similar thought: “If I had had more time at school to prepare and fewer classes, I think I would have been a better teacher. I need to start collecting materials and saving them for future teaching jobs.”

The time management issues also appear in Ganser’s (1999) research. Ganser’s participants complained of lack of spare time, burden of clerical work, and insufficient prep time.

### **Inadequate Guidance and Support**

The lack of guidance and support by the principal and administration was another similarity among the participants. However, Mississippi had a mentoring program in effect for the 2008–09 school term. Mentors should have offered new teachers expertise in their teaching areas and ideas for classroom motivation and discipline, and they should have helped them get to know their principal, administrators, and fellow teachers.

Mentors were paid a stipend by the state of \$1,000 per person mentored. The Mississippi Department of Education even identified the specific issues to be discussed with the new teacher (Mississippi, 2011). When asked about the state’s mentoring program, Ann

laughed, stating: “I saw him [the mentor] only when it was time to sign sheets so he could get his pay. No one helped me.” Frank remarked, “My mentor was not on the same hall and I seldom had time to look for him.” Curtis added, “My mentor hadn’t taught my subject in several years. She couldn’t really help me.” On the other hand, several participants stated “the teacher next door” or “the lady down the hall” immensely helped them. When the specific issues the Mississippi Department of Education required the mentors to discuss with new teachers were mentioned, Bill remarked, “That would have been nice to have heard.”

### **Relations with Principal and Administrators**

Several participants were very negative about administrators who visited classrooms. Donna stated, “They told me things that were wrong, but they did not know how to fix them or didn’t offer me any suggestions.” Ann added, “They [the district] offer staff development but it was never on issues that new teachers needed. Why can’t they address some of our issues?” Issues suggested by the participants included motivation, discipline, and time management. Frank commented on the consulting company the district hired to assist with test scores. “They [the consulting group] were of no help. I needed ideas and advice. All they did was criticize.” Helen contradicted this comment by saying, “The lady from the consulting group was amazing! She gave me so much that I just didn’t have time to go through it all. I don’t know what I would have done without her assistance.” The two participants teach different subjects at different schools and saw different consultants.

## **Classroom Discipline**

Discipline was another factor for both principals and teacher participants. Ann stated, “Those kids didn’t behave for anyone. It wasn’t just in my room.” The data showed that more negative comments about discipline came from the teachers in city schools rather than from the rural attendance centers.

When asked about preparation either in college or in alternative classes to control a classroom, Glenda laughed. “Our practice lessons were always before a class of our peers. I guess I just forgot how mean students can be to the vulnerable.” She stated that she was looking forward to visiting classrooms with productive, veteran teachers as part of her continued college education.

Donna insisted that discipline could have been better had the administration done something to the students who persistently disrupted class.

## **Clerical Work**

Donna was the first to state that the district constantly asked teachers to maintain records on testing, curriculum coverage, and retesting. She repeatedly asked, “Why should we do this? Who is going to read it?” Bill laughed when asked what he thought was done with the forms and files that teachers were asked to complete. “I’ve wanted all year to write something crazy down to see if anyone reads this stuff,” he laughed.

Ellen stated she understood keeping the records that the district required. “They [the district] are protecting us and themselves by making sure everything is done.” Ivan stated, “Paperwork is a part of any business. I’m used to doing it.”



When forced to place a value on the amount of time actually spent doing clerical work, each participant agreed that all work could be completed within 30 minutes each 9 weeks period. “I just don’t want to do,” Bill stated.

### **Discussion**

Overall, the findings of this study showed similarities to both Veenman’s (1984), Ganser’s (1999), and Ingersoll’s (2003) studies. Although teachers from different locations and at diverse points in their teaching careers placed similarities at different levels of importance, similarities did exist between the four studies.

Dealing with the use of time was apparent in three studies. In Ganser’s (1999) study, Veenman’s (1984) study, and this study, teachers discussed the lack of time. Often this was due to larger teaching loads or extra clerical work or the desire to offer improved organized instruction for individual student needs. A factor mentioned by the LMSD’s teachers’ lack of time was the addition of state-mandated testing in Mississippi, an issue that neither Ganser (1999) nor Veenman (1984) had to deal. Current teachers are forced to spend many hours teaching, reviewing, and reteaching tested items.

Motivation of students appeared in Veenman’s (1984) study, Ingersoll’s (2003) study, and this study. As noted earlier in the literature review, student motivation to achieve has been a major factor in education for decades. The economic stress of Tiny County may be a factor in the lack of motivation of students in this district. As the job base in Tiny County dwindles, many students do not see the value of an education. Ivan stated, “I tried to talk some of my students into going to the military. One young man stated that the military was not a great choice. He could stay in Tiny County and starve or go to the military and be shot in Iran.”

Veenman's (1984) study illustrated that teachers were concerned with assisting students with individual differences and needs. This was not a factor in Ganser's (1999) study, Ingersoll's study, or the current study. When questioned about tailoring lessons to meet the individual differences of students, most participants viewed the question dealt with special education students and special education instruction was the responsibility of the special education teacher.

Heavy teaching loads were a factor in both Ganser's study (1999) and this study. As teachers leave districts and are not or cannot be replaced, the teaching load of the remaining teachers often grows as a result. According to principals, teaching loads vary depending on the teaching area. The largest class size in the LMSD was 34 students, and the smallest class consisted of eight students. Both classes were advanced classes and had prerequisites for enrollment.

More similarities occurred between the LMSD findings and the Ganser (1999) and Ingersoll (2003) findings than with Veenman's (1984) findings. This could be because Ganser's and Ingersoll's teachers were all novice teachers and teaching in American schools.

All teachers in this study were novice teachers in American schools, and all did not received degrees in the field of education. Four participants were graduates of an established state-approved alternate licensure program. For these four participants not interacting in a regular high school classroom setting made a difference. For Ivan, the change from military life to that of a classroom made him feel unorganized and vulnerable. Glenda loved education, but she realized there was much more that she needed to know before becoming the teacher she wanted to be. Donna fantasized about

the life of a teacher and could not deal with the realities. Had Donna completed classroom visits and student teaching as required by education majors, she would have known the situations that teachers deal with daily. Student teaching and classroom visits would have also helped Bill who viewed employment in education as an 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. job.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Filling teacher vacancies with highly qualified teachers is a major problem in many areas of the United States. Administrators constantly seek qualified and dedicated teachers. When novice teachers begin their careers, many leave before teaching 3 or more years. This problem has become especially evident in the LMSD. This study examined the problem of retaining teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience in the LMSD.

Chapter five presents a summary of material covered in previous chapters. It will also discuss the implications that can be made based on this case study and offer recommendations for implementation of the findings.

#### **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter one examined the problem of teacher shortage in the United States. Dillon (2009) stated that staffing deficiencies across America have been a problem for so long that schools now accept teacher shortage as normal. This problem becomes compounded in Mississippi where colleges and universities produce fewer education majors each year. Of the number of new education majors hired in Mississippi, approximately half will leave teaching within the first 5 years (Bounds, 2008).

In the LMSD, retaining teachers has become a serious issue. The study is aimed at identifying variables that have caused the local teacher turnover. The effects of losing

teachers are already noticeable within the district. Therefore, this case study will determine the variables that have an effect on teacher turnover in the LMSD.

The existing literature, as discussed in chapter two, has addressed the problem from several viewpoints. *No Child Left Behind* intended to provide highly qualified teachers to all schools, especially rural schools. Yet, Eppley (2009) pointed out that the expectations of rural communities for education are unique and differ by location. The LMSD is considered a rural school district; therefore, education in rural schools became a focus in chapter two. Other areas of interest included the finding of highly qualified instructors, paying teachers on the same bases as urban areas, and maintaining productive working conditions.

All literature on novice teacher retention relates back to the work of three researchers: Veenman, Ganser, and Ingersoll. Veenman (1984) completed a study of teachers from the Netherlands. Veenman used both novice and veteran teachers in his study. Ganser (1999) conducted a similar study using American novice teachers. Ingersoll (2003) conducted a study using American novice teachers. Each study produced a list of reasons for teachers leaving education.

In Ganser's (1999) study, issues that might affect today's teachers in the LMSD were also discussed. The setting of LMSD as a rural school and the role a rural school takes in the community were discussed. New laws connected to *No Child Left Behind*, such as maintaining a highly qualified staff and administering state tests, have become major issues. Kelly (2009) stated that the retention of first-year teachers has long reaching implications. Other areas researched were teacher pay and working conditions.

Chapter three sets the research design which compared the three most important studies from the literature review with the outcome of this study. It also describes the nine participants who left the LMSD after 1 to 3 years of teaching and their opinions of problem areas. Since I had been an employee of the LMSD, participants knew me and were willing to be candid with their responses. Chapter three also explains the data collection procedures. A case study of teacher turnover was used. The case study supported and disclaimed existing theoretical constructs and gave a basis for ideas to retain teachers and improve the quality of staff in this school district.

All teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience who left the LMSD within a specified period of time were contacted. Principals and superintendents were also interviewed.

In chapter four, a detailed summary of the LMSD was given. Data were provided on each of the six schools within the district. This data included size of school, current state rating, and the racial and gender makeup of each school. Approximately 250 certified staff members are employed yearly. Of that number, the district replaced 62. Of the 62 who left, 30 had taught one to three years with the LMSD. Therefore, 30 teachers were contacted. Of those 30, nine former teachers agreed to participate. Nine participants or 36% of teachers who left with 3 or fewer years of experience were interviewed. Pseudonyms were assigned to each, and a description of each was given.

Collected data were summarized. The participants named eight factors in leaving their teaching positions. These factors included pressure to achieve higher test scores, motivating students, insufficient materials and supplies, heavy teaching loads resulting in insufficient prep time, inadequate guidance and support, poor relations with principal and

administration, classroom discipline, and the additional burden of clerical work. These factors were compared to Veenman's (1984), Ganser's (1999), and Ingersoll's (2001) studies.

As the data were compared, similarities existed between this case study and both of the earlier studies. Discipline and motivation of students were issues in all studies. However, more similarities appeared between this study and Ganser's (1999) and Ingersoll's (2001) studies. Ganser's (1999) study includes heavy teaching load with insufficient prep time and the lack of spare time. Veenman's study (1984) included organization of class work. On the other hand, the current study was conducted after the introduction of high-stakes testing and brought out the pressures of state testing.

### **Conclusions**

As a result of the data collected, several factors that were not relevant to earlier research were found to influence teachers to leave education.

#### **Research question 1**

Why are teachers leaving the LMSD after 3 or fewer years of teaching? State-mandated testing adds to the stress of teaching and to the already heavy load of paperwork. Participants agreed that teaching only material from the test did not meet the needs of the students. Paperwork dealing with testing and retesting proved to be time consuming for some participants.

The current economic climate of Tiny County discourages students from completing programs or graduating from school. Students are no longer motivated to get an education. Of the four large factories that served Tiny County 10 years ago, only one

still operates but has been downsized extensively. Unemployment is high, and jobs are scarce. Students who do find jobs are willing to quit school to earn more money. This economic problem has also affected the revenues collected by the schools and lowered operation budgets. Teachers who did not have the needed materials and supplies to meet the needs of their classroom agreed.

### **Research question 2**

What can the LMSD do in order to provide a more stable workforce? Factors, such as motivating students and classroom discipline, have been problems throughout the history of education. However, guidance and support and the relationship with principals and administration appeared to be a communication problem. Principals and administrators thought mentors were doing a specified job; however, they were not. Staff development was not aimed at new teachers with classroom problems. The new teachers felt overwhelmed with no one to share their frustrations.

### **Research question 3**

How can the retention rate of new teachers be increased? Based on this study, it is recommend the district create a mentoring program, provide campus liaisons, update curricula and materials, and offer incentives to students. Making these changes would improve the working conditions of the district and create a more inviting place to work.

### **Recommendations**

The district should create a site-based mentoring program for new teachers. One district-wide person or a person on each campus could achieve this program. Whether the district hired one person or a person on each campus, the job description would be the



same. This person would travel among new teachers, offering assistance and finding materials as needed. However, the person should be trained to watch the new instructor and offer constructive, positive ideas. This person would not have to be in the same subject area if provided time to find materials for the teacher. To keep from spending funds that are needed in other areas, an assistant principal might be given this position. Both Schools D and F have more than one assistant principal.

Many new teachers are not comfortable enough with the principal or administration to ask for assistance. A liaison could be named at every campus. This liaison would make sure he or she knew each new teacher and help teachers voice their opinions to the administration. Often new teachers have new ideas, but they are afraid to voice their opinions for fear of ridicule. This liaison could be a person already on staff, thus, not creating another financial obligation. This liaison could possibly be the mentor.

Curricula should be examined yearly to ensure that all courses have up-to-date materials. Each new teacher would receive a detailed curriculum for each course and a list of materials to accompany the curriculum, including available technology. Participants in the study complained that supplies were limited. Additional current textbooks and current maps were also needed. This problem could be eased if new teachers were aware ahead of time of what to expect. Administrators need to be aware of the desires of the teachers, also.

Finally, the district should establish a method to motivate students. Incentives for students who maintain certain grade point averages, make proficient or advanced on state tests, or graduate and continue their education would be helpful. This would motivate students and create a positive learning environment. Many of these incentives can be

guaranteed to students through applying for grants. The district currently has grant writers on staff. Other incentives can be established by a creative principal or mentor.

Of those teachers who left LMSD, four were alternately trained instead of attending the regular educational programs. Two of the four teachers completely left education. Alternative programs are usually held during the summer; however, an opportunity to visit classrooms, teach in front of high school students, and experience the teacher profession would be helpful to these new teachers.

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APPENDIX A  
PAULA STOKES'S RESUME

**Paula H. Stokes**  
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Little, MS 55555  
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E-mail: paulastokes53@yahoo.com

**EXPERIENCE:**

- 08/10–Present **Little Municipal School District** Little, MS
- Teaching AP Literature and Composition
  - Teaching Dual-Enrollment English Composition I and II
- 01/05–6/10 **Little Municipal School District** Little, MS  
*Principal of School A Attendance Center (Retired 6/10)*
- Maintained high performing school level
  - Composed of Grades K–12 with average 500 students
  - Created yearly schedules for students
  - Handled discipline
  - Oversaw 30 teachers and 15 other staff
- 08/80–01/05 **Little Municipal School District** Little, MS  
*Classroom Teacher at School A Attendance Center*
- Served as Lead Teacher for 3 years
  - Served as Department Head of English Department
  - Completed National Board Certification in Young Adult English
  - Named District Teacher of the Year twice
  - Taught English for grades 7–12 and Oral Communications
  - Served as local Beta Sponsor
  - Served as state Beta Sponsor
- 07/75–07/80 **Starkville High School** Starkville, MS  
*Classroom Teacher*
- Taught English I and II, Journalism I and II, and Oral Communications
- 07/82–06/10 **East Central Community College** Decatur, MS  
*Adjunct Professor*
- Taught off campus classes
  - Taught English I and II, American Literature I and II, and Oral Communications

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**EDUCATION:**

- August 2005–Present **Mississippi State University**  
PhD in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Education Administration
- May 2005 **Mississippi State University at Meridian**  
Education Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership
- May 1976 **Mississippi State University**  
Master’s Degree in Education
- May 1975 **Mississippi State University**  
BA Degree in Communications
- May 1971 **Tiny High School**  
High School Diploma

APPENDIX B  
LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Paula H. Stokes and I am working on my doctoral degree at Mississippi State University. My dissertation deals with the retention of teachers in the Little Municipal School District.

I would like to talk to you about your experience with this district. Your privacy will be maintained at all times. Your name will never appear in any form; all participants will receive a code name and only I will have access to the real name.

If you are willing to talk to me, you may call me at 555-555-5555, email me at [paulastokes53@yahoo.com](mailto:paulastokes53@yahoo.com), or write to me at 5555 Calhoun Road, Little, MS 55555. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Paula H. Stokes

APPENDIX C  
TOPICS TO BE COVERED WITH TEACHERS

## Topics to be covered with Teachers

1. Type of education license received
2. Expectations prior to teaching
3. Duties as a teacher
4. Working conditions
5. Pay
6. Expectations of District
7. Expectations of School
8. Expectations of Community
9. Your expectations of students
10. State Testing
11. Classroom materials
12. Highly Qualified staff
13. Support



APPENDIX D  
TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH ADMINISTRATORS

## Topics Discussed with Administrators

1. Expectations of New Teachers
2. Preferred Licensure
3. Support for New Teachers
4. Explanations for Turnovers
5. Working Conditions for Teachers
6. Materials/Funds for Materials
7. Discipline
8. Class Size

APPENDIX E

LMSD DATA

Table E1

*Number of District Professional Employees*

District Employees	
Position	Number
Full-time Teachers	223
Counselors	6
LEA Administrators	6
School Administrators	9
Student Support Services	17
Other Support Staff	121
Librarian/Media Specialists	9
Instructional Aides	39
Instructional Coordinators	4
Total	434

Table E2

2009 Demographic Breakdown of LMSD

Race	School C		School E		School D Jr. High		School F		School B		School A	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
American Indian	6	1	7	2	3	1	1	0.2	1	0.2	23	5
Asian	3	0.5	3	1	0	0.0	2	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
African American	420	73	393	76	250	74	455	74	250	58	104	21
Hispanic	3	0.5	1	1	0	0.0	2	0.4	1	0.2	0	0.0
Caucasian	144	25	118	20	86	25	156	25	176	41	357	74
Males	316		265		181		326		212		242	
Females	260		257		158		290		216		242	
Totals	576		522		339		616		428		484	

Table E3

*Demographics of Participants*

Participant	Race	Grade Taught	Campus Location	Traditional or Alternative Certification
Ann	Caucasian	10	School F	Traditional
Bill	Caucasian	11	School B	Alternative
Curtis	African American	7	School C	Traditional
Donna	Caucasian	11	School F	Alternative
Ellen	Caucasian	2	School G	Traditional
Frank	Caucasian	5	School G	Traditional
Glenda	African American	8	School A	Alternative
Helen	Caucasian	10	School F	Traditional
Ivan	Caucasian	11	School B	Alternative

Table E4

*Veenman's (1984) Top 5 Reasons for Teachers Leaving*

1	Classroom discipline
2	Dealing with individual differences
3	Motivating students
4	Organization of class work
5	Dealing with problems of individual students

Table E5

*Ganser's (1999) Top 5 Reasons for Teachers Leaving*

1	Lack of spare time
2	Burden of clerical work
3	Heavy teaching load resulting in insufficient prep time
4	Classroom discipline
5	Large class size

Table E6

*Ingersoll's (2003) Top Reasons for Teachers Leaving*

Ingersoll's Results	
1.	Lack of support from school administration
2.	Student discipline problems
3.	Poor student motivation
4.	Lack of input into school wide classroom

Table E7

*Top 8 Reasons for Leaving LMSD*

1	Pressure to achieve higher test scores
2	Motivating students
3	Insufficient materials and supplies
4	Heavy teaching load resulting in insufficient prep time
5	Inadequate guidance and support
6	Relations with principal and administrators
7	Classroom discipline
8	Burden of clerical work



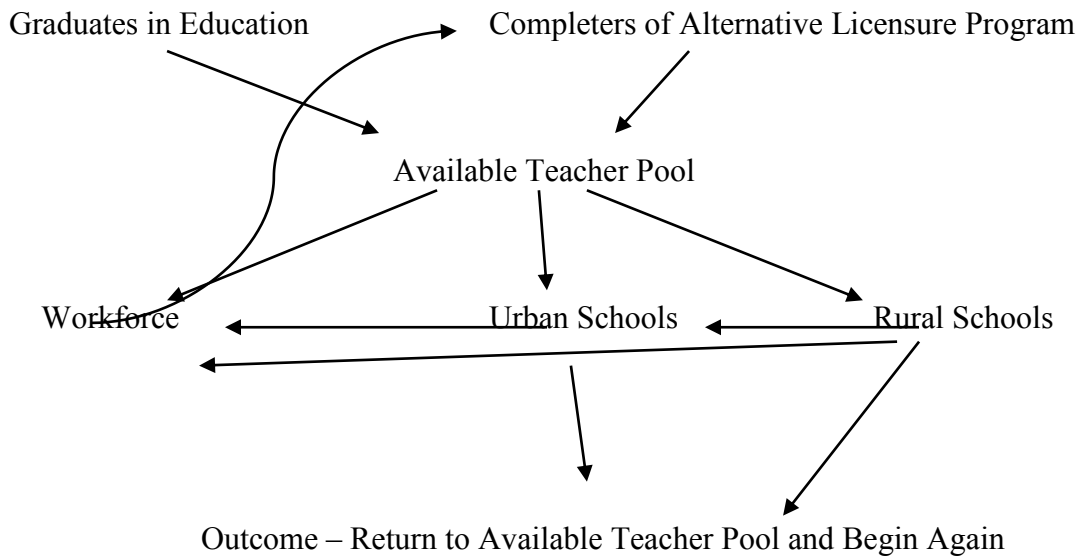


Figure E1. Flow Chart of Teacher Availability

The flow chart shows teacher join the available teacher pool from college graduates and alternative program completers; however, they are returning to the work force or moving to larger more urban schools rather than staying at rural schools.