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Abstract

Teacher retention in Hawai‘i is a challenge, particularly in high needs Title I schools. This qualitative case study explores the question “What factors influence teacher retention in Title I schools in Hawai‘i?” The participants were 10 early career and veteran teachers from three Title I schools within one O‘ahu public school complex. Data was collected through interviews and focus groups. Price’s (2001) Causal Model of Turnover, and Higgins’ (2003) Ethics of Teaching were used as the lenses to understand the data. Results revealed that these ten teachers were influenced by the social context of their school. Their relationships with colleagues, students, and administrators, were strong factors that kept them committed to teaching in their Title I schools. Other factors that influenced them were their own perspectives and understandings about the community in which they worked, acknowledgement received about their work, and knowing they had made a difference in their schools. Factors that influenced attrition at their schools, as well as implications for administrators, university teacher preparation programs, and teachers are also discussed.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... v

List of Tables .................................................................................................................. xiii

Chapter 1: A Case Study of Teacher Retention in Three Title I Hawai‘i Schools ............. 1
  Definitions of Terms ...................................................................................................... 1
  Researcher’s Interest in Teacher Retention ................................................................. 2
  Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 3
  Research Question ....................................................................................................... 3
  Overview of the Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks ............................. 4
  Overview of the Methodology ..................................................................................... 4
  Overview of Paper Organization ............................................................................... 5

Chapter 2: Literature Review ......................................................................................... 6
  Teacher Attrition and Retention ................................................................................. 6
  Teacher Attrition’s Effect on Student Achievement .................................................. 9
  Title I Schools ............................................................................................................. 10
    Title I Schools and Teacher Attrition ....................................................................... 10
    Title I Schools and Student Achievement ............................................................... 12
  Star Teachers .............................................................................................................. 14
  Hawai‘i ......................................................................................................................... 15
    Teacher Retention Research. ................................................................................... 15
    Title I, Teacher Retention, and Student Achievement ............................................. 16
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Mentoring and Induction</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on Teacher Retention</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on Student Achievement</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual Benefits Model</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methodology</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price’s Causal Model of Turnover</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higgins’ Ethics of Teaching</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paradigm</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population and Participant Description</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant description</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Recruitment</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Confidentiality</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of Human Subjects and Hawai‘i State Department of Education Consent to Conduct Research</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for Collecting Data</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact sharing</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vii
Methods for Coding and Analyzing Data ................................................................. 34

Methods for Reliability and Validity ........................................................................ 35

   Member check ................................................................................................. 35

   Triangulation ................................................................................................. 36

   Reliability ...................................................................................................... 36

   Validity .......................................................................................................... 36

Method of Reporting Data ...................................................................................... 37

Limitations .......................................................................................................... 37

Assumptions ........................................................................................................ 37

Role of the Researcher .......................................................................................... 38

Chapter 4: Results ............................................................................................... 40

Making a Difference ............................................................................................ 40

   School and student progress ........................................................................ 41

      Student character development and citizenship ................................... 41

      Student academic and behavioral success ........................................... 42

      School success ......................................................................................... 44

   Projects and programs ................................................................................. 45

Mentoring ............................................................................................................ 46

Acknowledgement ............................................................................................... 48

   By students and families .............................................................................. 48

   By peers and other professionals ........................................................... 50

   By administrators ....................................................................................... 51

   Feeling unacknowledged ............................................................................. 52
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perspective and Community Understanding</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous connections to community or students.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with students.</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative relationships between students and teachers.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach For America</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland recruits and new teachers</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support and Relationships with Colleagues</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Support</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Support</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative relationships between teachers.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach For America</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative teacher relationships</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary veteran and early career teacher relationships</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative relationships</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School vision and structures of support.</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Study and Findings ............................................................................. 85
Discussion of Results ................................................................................................. 86
Teacher Attrition ........................................................................................................ 86
Making a Difference ................................................................................................. 87
Ethics of teaching ..................................................................................................... 87
Leadership ................................................................................................................ 88
Administrative support .............................................................................................. 90
Positive relationships ............................................................................................... 91
Praise and acknowledgement .................................................................................... 92
Vision implementation .............................................................................................. 94
Students in Poverty .................................................................................................... 95
Relationships ............................................................................................................. 99
Mentoring and induction ......................................................................................... 100
Formal support ......................................................................................................... 101
Informal mentoring ................................................................................................. 102
Other Factors ........................................................................................................... 105
Facilities and resources ......................................................................................... 105
TFA, mainland recruits, and new teachers .............................................................. 105
Theoretical Frameworks .......................................................................................... 107
Price’s Causal Model of Turnover .......................................................................... 108
Higgins’ Ethics of Teaching ..................................................................................... 109
Implications and Suggestions for Practice ............................................................ 111
Administrators ......................................................................................................... 111
Appendix D: Teacher Survey .................................................................141
Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions for All Participants ..................142
Appendix F: Focus Group Questions ................................................................145
List of Tables

Table 1. Teacher Attrition of Participating Schools’ New Hires from 2008–2013 ..................26
Table 2. Study Participants’ Teaching Experience .................................................................30
Table 3. Themes and Theoretical Framework Analysis .......................................................107
Chapter 1: A Case Study of Teacher Retention in Three Title I Hawai‘i Schools

The purpose of qualitative case study is to explore and understand teacher retention in three high needs Title I Hawai‘i schools for four beginning teachers and six veteran teachers. Title I schools continually have challenges in raising student achievement, motivating students, and retaining teachers. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on teacher retention by specifically focusing on teachers that voluntarily work in Title I school settings, particularly in high needs schools, where there are high numbers of minority students, students in poverty, and low-performing students.

This chapter serves to introduce the study and share the researcher’s interest in teacher retention in Title I schools.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this research, the following terms and definitions were utilized:

- Attrition: “a reduction in numbers usually as a result of resignation, retirement, or death” (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/attrition, 2015).
- Early career teacher: a teacher that has been teaching for 6 years or less.
- High needs school: Schools with high levels of minority students, students in poverty, and low-performers (Imazeki, 2008).
- Poverty: “Those from families with incomes that are above 130 and up to 185 percent of the poverty level who are eligible for reduced-price meals.” (National Center for Education Statistics, April 2014, para. 1).
- Retention: Voluntarily staying in a position from one year to the next.
- Socioeconomic status (SES): “Socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation.” (http://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/).
- Low socioeconomic status school: A school that serves a population of predominantly low SES students.
- Title I school: A school in which at least 47.2% of the student population received free or reduced-price meals for school year 2012–2013.
- Turnover: “the degree of individual movement across the membership boundary of a
social system.” (Price, 1977, p. 4).

- Veteran teacher: a teacher that has been teaching for 7 or more years.
- Voluntary turnover: turnover that is initiated by an individual; movement that is of an individual’s choosing.

**Researcher’s Interest in Teacher Retention**

This research on teacher retention in Title I schools stems from my experience as an educator in the Hawai‘i State Department of Education (DOE). I taught for 15 years in the DOE, in the Leeward District, where the majority of the schools are designated Title I schools. My career began as a classroom teacher at Nānāikapono Elementary School in the community and complex of Nānākuli. During my employment at Nānāikapono Elementary, besides teaching third, fifth and sixth grades, I was also a Title I teacher and curriculum coordinator. As a curriculum coordinator, I supported teachers in their classrooms and helped them to improve their teaching skills, strategies and understandings about curriculum and the way students learn. In particular, much time was spent in mentoring and supporting new teachers—to get them acclimated to the culture and curriculum of the school. After my employment at Nānāikapono Elementary, I accepted a position as a New Teacher Advisor (NTA) with the Leeward District office. This position gave me the opportunity to continue providing personal, professional, and emotional support to teachers, as well as offer them professional development opportunities.

I had never been on the Leeward Coast of O‘ahu before my interview at Nānāikapono. The Leeward Coast is far removed, both in location and personal experience from where I grew up. I was raised in central Honolulu, in the town of Nu‘uanu, where the median family income and property values are comparably higher than those on the Leeward Coast. I also went to private schools since pre-school and had never been anywhere near the Leeward Coast. The Leeward Coast had always been portrayed to me as a poor and violent place and thus, one that I never visited. However, as a new graduate, looking for a teaching position, I took the first job offer I received. My first position was as a Title I teacher at Nānāikapono Elementary School in Nānākuli.

Once I received my tenure, it would not have been surprising if I had applied to transfer to another school with a higher achieving student population, or one that was closer to my home in Honolulu. However, I loved working at the school, and felt welcomed by the students, the families and staff. I also felt appreciated there, and although I witnessed the poverty and some of
the crime in the community, the enjoyment I got from teaching at the school overshadowed any negativity. I voluntarily remained working in this high needs Title I school in Nānākuli for ten years, and then continued to work with the school and other Leeward District schools as a DOE resource teacher and in my employment at the University of Hawai‘i. It was here at the University of Hawai‘i that I began to contemplate the reasons that teachers, like myself, voluntarily remained in high needs Title I school settings. Many of my friends and former colleagues continue to teach in schools in the Leeward District voluntarily. What are the common factors that keep these teachers in their schools?

Significance of the Study

Studies specifically on teacher retention have not focused on teacher retention within high needs Title I schools. Thus, my study extends the knowledge in this area, reflecting retention related to hard-to-fill teaching positions. Harper (2009) conducted research on K-12 teachers in one school district in Mississippi. In her “Recommendations” section, Harper called for more research to be done, specifically in interviewing teachers who have taught in hard-to-staff schools to gain a better understanding of the reasons why these teachers continue to teach in these settings. This research explored teacher retention in three Title I Hawai‘i schools. This study has practical application for schools, administrators, and DOE personnel offices that support educators in Title I schools.

This study was limited to three schools encompassing elementary and secondary settings, therefore generalizing the data is of concern. However, my sampling method and the cross-section of participants provided some diversity in the data and experiences gathered. The sampling provided enough diversity to get an understanding of the participants’ experiences and provide useful information to others in describing ways to support teachers in Title I schools. Ultimately, the hope is that this research has an impact on student achievement, which is fundamental to what our education system in the United States is striving for, as well as to support teacher retention for Title I schools.

Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand teacher retention from the perspectives of four early career teachers, and six veteran teachers in three Title I schools in Hawai‘i. The research question is: What are the factors that influence the retention of teachers in high needs Title I schools in Hawai‘i?
Overview of the Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

Based on this study of 10 teachers at three Title I schools in Hawai'i, the following themes addressed the literature review for this dissertation: employment turnover and retention theories; teacher attrition and retention; characteristics of high needs Title I schools and students; and mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers. Employment turnover and retention theories provide a theoretical framework for the study. Research on teacher attrition and retention, and mentoring and induction programs give a historical context to the study, and the description of Title I schools and students provide an understanding of the setting and participants in the study.

The theoretical frameworks for this study is based on Price’s (2001) Causal Model of Turnover, as well as Higgins’ (2003) Ethics of Teaching.

Overview of the Methodology

Teachers were recommended for this study by school administrators, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UH-Mānoa) faculty, mentor teacher lists from the Master of Education in Teaching program at UH-Mānoa, and by current teaching faculty at the participating schools. Teachers were initially contacted by email and those interested responded by email and phone call.

After participants were chosen and consent forms were signed, a survey was given to each teacher participant. This provided information about the participants’ demographic information and their career history. One in-depth, semi-structured interview was conducted with all 10 teacher participants from the two career groups: elementary and secondary. Teacher participants were asked to bring an artifact to the interview that was related to their teaching career–something that represented their career or had special meaning to their teaching experience. One focus group was then conducted for each school level group–one with the elementary teachers and another with the secondary teachers. Themes were discussed that emerged from the first set of interviews with both career groups. Particularly, themes that emerged out of the difference between the elementary and secondary teacher interviews were addressed with both groups in an attempt to clarify the findings for both school levels.

This study employed a multiple case study design. The case studies presented within this research were bound by type of school: high needs low SES schools, identified as low SES by
their Title I status. Case study design was chosen with the purpose of exploring the participants’ lived experiences as teachers in low SES schools.

**Overview of Paper Organization**

The remainder of this study is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the topic of teacher retention in Title I schools. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for the study and the theoretical frameworks used. Chapter 4 describes and presents the data gathered, and Chapter 5 analyzes the findings, shares implications for practice and presents conclusions on the findings.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following themes will address the literature review for this dissertation: teacher attrition and retention; characteristics of Title I schools and students; teacher mentoring and induction programs; and employment turnover theories. Research on teacher attrition and retention, and teacher mentoring and induction programs will give a historical context to the study and description of Title I schools and their challenges with teacher retention and student achievement will provide an understanding of the setting and participants in the study.

Teacher Attrition and Retention

Teacher attrition is a complex issue, which contains countless reasons why teachers leave the profession. In the United States, 25% of teachers leave the profession before their third year in the field and 40% leave within the first five years (Chang, 2009). This is sobering data for a country where education is considered a priority (https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/reform, n.d.). The average teaching career length is approximately 11 years (Haberman, 2004). Teacher attrition is of great concern to all in the field of education, particularly due to its effects on student achievement.

Teacher attrition typically follows a U-shaped curve, wherein teachers typically leave the profession early on or later in their careers (Grissmer, Kirby, Schlegel, & Young, 1992; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll 2001). Teacher attrition is very closely correlated with age. Teachers tend to leave the profession early in their careers, for various reasons, such as a desire for a career change or for personal or family reasons. In Ingersoll’s 2001 study, younger teachers were 171% more likely to leave the profession than middle-aged teachers. Teachers also largely leave the profession later in their careers due to retirement or health issues.

A great deal of research has been done to identify the areas that affect teachers’ decisions to leave the field of education. Research has found that teachers leave the profession for various reasons, the main reasons being: lack of administrative support, inadequate facilities, inadequate salary, large amounts of paperwork, large class sizes, difficult-to-manage students, and minimal input into organizational decision-making (Changying, 2007; Dillon, 2009; Haberman, 2004; Hong, 2010; Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The lack of administrative support, large amounts of paperwork, large class sizes and difficult-to-manage students leave teachers feeling overwhelmed with their daily work. The issue of inadequate salary symbolically measures the “importance a society places on the work one does” (Harper,
Thus, a teacher’s salary reflects the profession’s status in the larger society. All of these factors increase the chances of teacher attrition.

When teachers feel that they have minimal input into decision-making within their classroom or school—be it curriculum decisions or otherwise—their sense of autonomy and ownership over their careers and classrooms is diminished. Teachers cite their work environment as not enjoyable and unresponsive, thus increasing turnover at a school (Cockburn & Haydn, 2004; Hong, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001). “Burnout is caused by working hard in depersonalized organizations, thick with regulations, which impact negatively on teaching and learning” (Haberman, 2004, p. 26). On the contrary, if teachers feel empowered to make instructional decisions, they feel valued and less likely to leave the profession (Cockburn & Haydn, 2004; Dillon, 2009). Hughes (2012) asserts that administrators have a great deal of influence on teacher retention. When administrators communicate clear expectations, give teachers ownership of their work and school policies, and create a positive school climate, teachers tend to remain in their schools.

A positive school climate is reflected in workgroup cohesion, which also has an effect on teacher retention. Teachers who feel a sense of community or part of a group that works well together are less likely to leave the profession (Guin, 2004). Studies have linked positive work group cohesion, or teamwork, to levels of staff relational trust—the relationships and social exchanges between different school role groups (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). The assumption is that with increased relational trust, there is a better chance for school improvement, which also relates to student achievement.

Teacher attrition has also been linked to specific teacher characteristics (Ingersoll, 2001). Special education, mathematics, and science teachers are more likely to leave the profession than teachers of other content areas (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & May, 2012). There is conflicting research on which gender tends to leave teaching more frequently. Borman and Dowling (2008) state that males are more likely to leave the profession than their female counterparts. However, Guarino et al. (2006) found that females leave the profession more often than males. Borman and Dowling (2008) also found that married women and women with a new child were more likely to leave teaching than unmarried or childless females. Research has also found that White teachers have higher attrition rates than minority teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll 2001; Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 1999).
The body of research on the teacher characteristic of teacher preparation found that teachers without graduate degrees have a higher attrition rate than those with graduate degrees (Harper, 2009), and teachers that had more pedagogical training tend to leave the profession less frequently than those who have had little to no pedagogical training (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). However, Goldhaber and Brewer (1997), using the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, found that there was little difference in attrition between masters and non-masters degree teachers. Thus, the literature seems inconclusive.

Teacher attrition and retention have also been influenced by school and student body characteristics. Borman and Dowling (2008) compiled a literature review and analyzed the current research on teacher attrition and retention. In their study, they analyzed research on teacher characteristics, school student body characteristics and teacher quality and found that schools with higher numbers of minority students saw higher attrition rates than those with more homogeneous student populations. Also, teachers of high achieving students were less likely to leave the profession, as well as teachers of students of middle/high socio-economic status (SES). Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003), and Ingersoll (2001) published similar findings – that low SES schools had teacher turnover rates 50% higher than higher SES schools.

There is an intrinsic reward to the profession of teaching. Teachers feel fulfillment in the relationships with their students, “making a difference” in students’ lives and seeing their students learn and grow as a result of their efforts (Carr, 2009; Cockburn & Haydn, 2004; 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2003). “Teachers’ decisions to remain in teaching are also impacted by their perceptions of effectiveness with their students, with 6% of new teachers leaving due to lack of influence (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003)” (Hughes, 2012, pp. 246-247). Teachers’ perceptions of their own efficacy are important factors influencing their decisions to remain in their schools. So, although salary is said to be a factor in teacher attrition, retention studies have shown that oftentimes, teachers will remain teaching despite this challenge. The intrinsic rewards of teaching outweigh other external factors such as salary, large amounts of paperwork and large class sizes (Carr, 2009). Knowing that teachers are intrinsically motivated, Carr suggested, “…even the most self-motivated individual sometimes needs a pat on the back. With burnout high in the nation’s more challenging schools, principals and district leaders need to invest more time in thanking teachers of the excellent work they do” (p. 54).
As stated earlier, when teachers do not feel in control of curriculum decisions, they also have higher attrition rates. On the contrary, if teachers feel empowered to make instructional decisions, they feel valued and less likely to leave the profession (Cockburn & Haydn, 2004; Dillon, 2009).

**Teacher Attrition’s Effect on Student Achievement**

Research has found a correlation between teacher attrition rates and student achievement. Schools with higher teacher attrition have lower student achievement (Guin, 2004; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001). However, the research has not found a direct causal relationship between the two variables. Other factors, such as poverty or unsupportive administration could, at the same time, cause both higher teacher attrition as well as lower student achievement. No study has made a clear, direct, causal relationship between student achievement and teacher attrition.

The study with the strongest evidence for a causal relationship between teacher attrition and student achievement is Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff’s 2013 quantitative study based on the New York Department of Education and the New York State Education Department’s 850,000 observations of all fourth and fifth grade students over an eight year period. The researchers gathered their evidence using a “unique identification strategy and two classes of fixed-effects regression models” (p. 8). Their study found that language arts and mathematics student achievement scores were lower in grade levels where teacher attrition was higher. Teacher attrition could affect student achievement in that a teacher who replaces the “leaver”, could either be more effective or less effective. However, even if the replacement teacher is just as or more effective than the leaving teacher, the replacement could still cause a disruption within the school, affecting many students.

Overall, Ronfeldt et al. (2013) found that students were affected negatively “by the changing composition in teacher effectiveness that results from teacher turnover, primarily in lower-performing schools” (p. 29). They found that student achievement was affected by various factors such as teaching experience, teacher migration, and prior effectiveness. They also found that there is a disruptive effect on the student achievement of stayers, or teachers who remain at the school. Thus, teacher attrition affects both the students of teachers who leave as well as those who stay.
Teacher attrition and its effects on student achievement can be compositional or disruptive. The composition of teachers who stay, leave, and those replacing them can affect student achievement. If a replacement teacher is more effective than the leaving teacher, then the compositional effect is positive. However, if the replacement teacher is less effective than the leaving teacher, then the compositional effect is negative. Depending on the composition of the stayers and leavers, the school and students could benefit from teacher turnover. Some research has found that teachers who remain in low achieving schools with high minority populations are either as effective or more effective than those who leave (Ingersoll, 2001). Thus, turnover is not always considered negative. When teachers leave one school to go to another more suited for them or for other reasons, it could be a positive change for the teacher, the schools and the students.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that cohesion and a sense of community within a staff are related to student achievement. The relationships and degree of trust between teachers, and between teachers and students, predict student achievement. Thus, when teachers leave schools the relationships between teachers, and between teachers and students, change. This supports the findings that there is a disruptive influence on the organization of a school when teachers leave. Hanselman, Grigg, Bruch, and Gamoran (2011), as cited by Ronfeldt et al. (2013), in a study on principal and teacher turnover, found that when a teacher or a principal leaves, there is a disruptive effect to the school. The disruption affects staff relationships—collegiality, trust and sense of community—which is what Hanselman et al’s study implied as attrition affected all students—not just those whose teachers left. There was still a disruption to the larger school organization. This disruption could have either a positive or negative effect on the school, the students, and student achievement, depending on the school’s conditions before the teacher left. For example, if the leaving teacher was, or was not, part of an already cohesive staff the disruptive effect could be positive or negative.

**Title I Schools**

**Title I Schools and Teacher Attrition.**

Schools serving low-income, or low socioeconomic status (SES) populations, continually struggle to retain teachers and increase student achievement. Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, and Salgado (2005), as cited by Harper (2009) states, “Urban and rural school districts
that serve minority and low-income students have a difficult task in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers” (p. 22).

Low SES schools are hurt by teacher turnover, up to 50% higher than schools with students of higher SES (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001). “Teacher turnover rates can be high, particularly in schools serving low income, non-White, and low-achieving student populations” (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 5). Robinson (2007), asserts that research has proven that “good teachers [to] avoid poor schools, and for experienced teachers to leave them.”

Teachers of high achieving students were less likely to leave the profession, as well as teachers of students of middle/high socio-economic status (SES). There was higher turnover in schools with large percentages of students receiving free or reduced meal services. Borman and Dowling stated that in one study there was a 1.73 times higher chance of attrition of those schools with 20% or more of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch services, than schools with less than 20% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch services.

Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin’s 2004 study used data from the UTD Texas Schools Project, which included student demographic and assessment data, and teacher demographic and employment data for each year from 1993–1996. They found that “Higher average student achievement significantly reduces the probability of moving or exiting Texas public schools at all levels of experience” (p. 343). Their study implies that lower student achievement increases the probability of teacher movement out of a school.

Low SES schools tend to have difficulty in developing and maintaining solid organizational structure as well as amenities that could attract teachers to the school (National Education Association, 2002–2013). Horng (2005) surveyed 547 teachers in a large, urban school district in California, which represented 49% of the full-time, regular education, elementary teachers in the district. She found, like most other researchers, that teacher attrition is higher at low SES schools. Although the assumption is that the teachers are moving to schools with higher SES populations, to move away from low SES students, Horng argues that teachers are actually not moving away from the students themselves, but from schools with inadequate facilities, administrative support, resources for students, large class sizes and low teacher input on school-wide decisions. Horng asked the teacher participants to rank order a list of 10 attributes that would influence their decisions to stay or leave a school. Out of the 10 attributes, student SES was rated seventh on the list. The top three attributes that would affect a teacher’s
decision to stay or leave a school were school facilities, administrative support, and class size. The bottom three attributes were student SES, student performance, and student ethnicity. As part of her survey, she also asked participants to indicate what type of school they would most like to teach at: a) a school of low-income, African American and Latino students, with unclean and unsafe facilities; b) a school of middle-income, White and Asian students with clean and safe facilities; c) a school of low-income, African American and Latino Students with clean and safe facilities; or d) a school of middle-income, White and Asian students with unclean and unsafe facilities. The majority of the teachers chose the schools with clean and safe facilities, regardless of SES or student ethnicity. This, Horng argues, is the reason that teachers often leave low SES schools—the conditions of the school, rather than the students themselves. This study bears interesting results and implications for schools as they look at ways to improve school conditions. However, as Horng’s school preference data was based on choosing hypothetical schools with only 4 attributes to consider, the real-life reasons that teachers may actually leave may differ from the results of this study. Horng’s study does support the arguments made in the larger body of research regarding teacher attrition in general—that teachers tend to leave the profession in part to inadequate facilities.

**Title I Schools and Student Achievement.**

A large body of research has found that low SES schools tend to have low rates of student achievement. There is an achievement gap between economic classes. Lower SES students tend to have lower achievement in school. Berliner (2006), as cited by Frost (2007), states that a great number of studies have shown a strong relationship between poverty and student achievement for all types of ethnic groups. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) found that students scored lower in both mathematics and language arts in grade levels where teacher turnover was higher. As there is a correlation between teacher retention and student achievement, this issue’s value is of great importance. Morgan (2012) says, “In order for students who live in low-income areas to do well in school, they need competent teachers who understand their needs” (p. 293). Improving our understanding of the reasons that teachers who teach in Title I schools voluntarily remain in these settings, could help to retain more teachers in these schools, and thus have a positive impact on student achievement.

In Borg, Borg, and Stranahan’s 2012 study, low SES students, as measured by their free/reduced-price lunch status, scored three to five points lower on reading and mathematics
tests than students who were of higher SES. What is of great interest was their finding that if the students were from a predominantly low SES school, their mathematics and reading scores were 3 points lower than their higher SES peers. However, if the low SES students were from a predominantly high SES school, their mathematics and reading scores were four to five points lower than their higher SES peers. The researchers concluded that low SES schools are better at teaching low SES students, compared to high SES schools.

Gonzales et al. (2004), published Highlights from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003 for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NCES is the organization that carries out one of the federal government’s mandates to collect and report the progress and state of American and other nations’ education, in order to improve education in the United States. It was reported as the percentage of students identified as low SES within a school increased, the average mathematics and science scores decreased, showing an inverse relationship. Mathematics scores ranged from an average of 567/600 for mathematics, and 579/600 for science. Schools with less than 10% of the students in poverty, and an average score of 471/600 for mathematics and 480/600 for science for schools with more than 75% of the students in poverty. Another report, the Progress in International Reading Literacy, which is given to 9- and 10-year-olds in 35 countries, ranked the United States 3rd statistically and 9th overall, revealing impressive literacy skills for 9-year olds. However, the reading scores for students in poverty, in schools where 75% or more of the students are receiving free or reduced-priced meals, were approximately 100 points below their more affluent peers (Ogle et al.2003). This is similar data to the TIMSS report findings, which emphasizes the disturbing trend of students in poverty having lower academic achievement than their peers.

Multiple studies have shown that students from low SES backgrounds have home lives that affect their school experiences and cognitive and academic development. Low SES children usually perform lower on intelligence tests and academic achievement assessments than those children of higher SES (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Kirby et al., 1999). Family income is one of many factors that influences “predicted intellectual attainment” (Mercy & Steelman, 1982). The access to educational opportunities and resources are less when a child is from an impoverished background, as family income dictates what resources and opportunities may or may not be available. Berliner (2006) argues that research has shown that intelligence quotient (IQ) does not vary much between social classes–low, middle, and high SES–but that environmental factors
have a great influence on academic ability or intelligence, particularly in lower SES groups. … environmental changes for poor children might be predicted to have much bigger effects than similar changes made in the environments for wealthier children. This often appears to be the case, a conclusion reached by Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (2001) using different data. When I look at the studies of the effects of small class size for the poor, or the effects of early childhood education for the poor, or the effects of summer school programs for the poor, the largest effects are found among the poorest children (p. 971).

Schools, then, can make changes to have greater effects on low-income students’ challenges and their academic achievement.

**Star Teachers**

Dr. Martin Haberman, distinguished professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, did extensive research on effective teachers of diverse students and youth in poverty. He agreed with other researchers that low SES schools and schools with diverse populations suffer from high teacher turnover. In his book, *Star Teachers: The Ideology and Best Practice of Effective Teachers of Diverse Children and Youth in Poverty* (2004), he discussed his methods in understanding underlying reasons for teacher attrition within this particular school and student population and also suggested ways to counter this problem in our schools.

Haberman (2004) was assertive in his arguments about the reasons why teachers tend to leave these schools—in particular, those schools with diverse and low SES students. “Teacher attrition increases as the number of minority students increases. Quitter/failures cannot connect with, establish rapport, or reach diverse children in urban poverty because they do not respect and care enough about them to want to be their teachers” (p. 8-9). He argues that teachers …leave because they cannot connect with the students and it is a continuous draining hassle for them to keep students on task. Shortly after their hiring, leavers are emotionally and physically exhausted from struggling against resisting students for six hours every day. (2004, p. 9).

Haberman found that there are particular characteristics of Star Teachers. The teachers who are most effective with diverse and low SES students are those that are “not the best and the brightest”, but those that have the motivation and skill to work with the students. The “best and the brightest”—those from well-known universities, with high SAT scores and GPAs—tend to leave their teaching positions at low SES and diverse schools more frequently than their less “on-
paper” qualified peers. Haberman’s research has found that there are particular individual qualities of those who are most effective teachers of low SES and diverse students. Teachers that focus on their students, build and maintain positive relationships with them, their families and the staff at the schools, have high expectations of their students, and take responsibility for their actions and their students’ learning are most effective in working with low SES and diverse students. “…it is only after the teacher has demonstrated the ability to relate to diverse children in poverty that the teacher’s knowledge becomes transferable to students” (Haberman, 2004, p. 10).

If we have a better understanding of why veteran teachers who teach in Title I schools voluntarily remain in these settings, we may be able to retain more teachers in these schools, and thus have a positive impact on student achievement and teacher job satisfaction.

**Hawai‘i**

**Teacher Retention Research.**

Very few studies have been done on teacher retention specifically in Hawai‘i. In 2008, Thomas Benjamin researched special education teacher retention on the neighbor islands of Hawai‘i. In his study, he found that the teachers’ objectives of succeeding with students and the commitment to teach were the motivating factors in choosing to become special education teachers. Once in the profession, there were a variety of factors that influenced the teachers’ job satisfaction and commitment to teach. Administrators were instrumental in teachers’ satisfaction, as well as mentoring programs when teachers took the opportunity to participate in them. Other areas that affected teacher satisfaction were stress levels of teachers and support provided, success with students, lack of resources or materials, and other personnel supports for teachers.

More recently, in 2011, Helen Hasegawa’s dissertation on teacher retention in the Hawai‘i DOE schools amongst graduates of UH-Mānoa teacher education programs found that school leadership and working conditions were strong factors that affected teachers’ employment satisfaction. She also found that professional development supports, both formal and informal, influenced teachers’ job satisfaction and intent to stay in the profession. She concluded that when teachers were content in their schools, they did not choose to leave or seek out other employment in other professions. She also interestingly found that teachers in Hawai‘i are no more likely to leave the profession as compared to other states. She asserted that beginning teachers believed that opportunities for collaboration and professional development opportunities in which they
could improve their teaching skills were important. The results of these two studies were consistent with other research done outside of the state.

**Title I, Teacher Retention, and Student Achievement.**

Title I schools are identified by the federal government as those schools that serve a large economically disadvantaged population, or “students whose families meet the income qualifications for the federal free/reduced-cost lunch program.” (Hawai’i State DOE, 2013, p. 21). Once identified, these schools are awarded federal funds according to the Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to “provide financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html). The Title I designation “is an indicator of school-community poverty” (Hawai’i State DOE, 2013, p. 22).

In the 2013-2014 school year, the DOE was comprised of 285 schools: 32 charter schools and 253 public schools. There were 7 districts and each district was made up of complexes and their complex areas. A complex encompasses a community’s high school, and its feeder intermediate or middle schools, and elementary schools. The size and number of schools in each complex varies by community.

164,065 students were enrolled in non-charter, Department of Education public schools, K-12. An additional 9,593 were enrolled in charter schools. Approximately 51% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged (Hawai’i State Department of Education, 2013).

In the 2012–2013 school year, 226 of 287 total DOE schools were identified as Title I schools, where at least 35% of the student population received free or reduced-price meals. In school year 2013-2014, the number of Title I schools decreased due to federal funding cuts. Title I schools were then identified as those schools with 47.2% of the student population receiving free or reduced-price meals. That being said, the number of students in poverty did not necessarily change, but the identification of Title I schools by the federal government has, making it more difficult for schools to receive federal funds.

Student achievement is a pressing issue that Title I schools face. The Hawai’i State Assessment (HSA) mandated by the federal government, which was given every year to 3rd through 8th graders, and 10th graders, was one indicator of school progress and student
achievement. In the 2014-2015 school year, the DOE administered the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC) in place of the former HSA test. In the 2012-2013 school year, the average of the percentage of students who met or exceeded proficiency in the HSA reading assessment across grade levels statewide was 72.5%. The average of the percentage of students who met or exceeded proficiency in mathematics across grade levels statewide was 62.75%. The proficiency averages for individual districts varied greatly due to the community demographics and student population of each school. Communities with higher socioeconomic demographics tended to have schools with higher academic proficiency averages than those in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. For example, the Windward District, where the median income in 2013 was higher than the state average, running anywhere from $70,000 to over $90,000 depending on the specific community (http://arch.k12.hi.us/school/ssir/ssir.html, 2014), surpassed the state average in students who met or exceeded proficiency in both mathematics and reading. Windward District’s average percentage of students who met or exceeded proficiency in mathematics was 64% as compared to the state average of 59%. Their district’s average percentage of students who met or exceeded proficiency in reading was 77.5% as compared to the state average of 73%. Compare those numbers to the Leeward district, where 52.3% of the students met or exceeded proficiency in mathematics, and 64.8% of tested students met or exceeded proficiency in reading. The average number of students that met or exceeded proficiency in both content areas were lower than the state averages. The Leeward District median income, depending on the community, was between $55,000 and $81,000, with the state median income $66,420. The income levels and achievement levels of schools vary by district and seem to indicate a relationship between each. In terms of teacher retention within the Districts, the Leeward District, across complexes, had 62% of teachers on average that taught for 5 or more years at their school, which was the same percentage across the state. Leeward District teacher experience averaged about 12 years. The Windward District, across complexes, had a slightly higher average at 65% across its complexes of those teachers teaching 5 or more years at their schools, and its teachers had approximately 13 years of teaching experience over the complexes. These numbers indicate that in the Windward District, the median income was higher than the state average, as were its school academic proficiencies and the amount of teachers who remained at their same school for 5 or more years. The Leeward District and Windward District both had almost the same percentage of teachers with 5 or more years of experience in their schools. However, as the
average number of years of experience in the Windward District is greater than the average years of experience for teachers in the Leeward District, the Leeward District’s teacher population had less experience than the Windward District. Teacher retention and amount of teaching experience was a greater challenge in the Leeward District where the socioeconomic levels are lower than in the Windward area. This comparative example is used to illustrate the differences between two communities of differing socioeconomic levels.

**Teacher Mentoring and Induction**

A factor that influences teacher retention is in the various forms of support that teachers receive. Mentoring and induction programs at school sites have helped teacher retention rates (Kapadia, Coca, & Easton, 2007; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The term “mentoring” is often used when describing “personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools” (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 203) and “teacher induction” is often used when describing “a variety of different types of activities for new teachers” (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 203). However, the terms are often synonymous and used reciprocally. For the purposes of this paper, “mentoring programs” will be defined as the guidance given to new teachers by late career (veteran) teachers, as well as the activities provided to new teachers to help them acclimate themselves to their school and profession, improve teacher performance, and increase probability of their retention within the profession. The mentored beginning teachers will be identified as “mentees” throughout the remainder of this paper.

Mentoring and induction programs provide pedagogical, personal, and emotional support to new teachers. Mentors are also valued as colleagues whom a new teacher can approach with questions about school protocols. Smith and Ingersoll’s 2004 study, using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), found that the attrition for teachers with induction support was significantly less than others. Cockburn and Haydn (2004) collected evaluation and feedback after teacher training sessions and they found that “the climate of mentoring—the extent to which the trainee [new teacher] is made to feel welcome, part of the school and given support in the early stages of the placement in particular—ranks very highly in their feelings about their placement” (p. 55). Specifically, the new teachers responded positively to the affective part of mentoring. They wanted friendly encouragement in a “sympathetic working environment” (p. 55), as well as critical feedback and strong induction into teaching. The assumption is that if the teachers were supported in this
manner, with rigor related to the teaching curriculum, and in a friendly, supportive way by their peers, they were happier and would in turn be more likely to stay in their position and profession. Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) assert that mentoring of new teachers by more experienced teachers and administrators is a way to support the retention of teachers. They also suggest multiple ways to increase teacher retention—through teacher induction programs, good hiring practices by administrators, reducing new teacher teaching loads, fitting teacher qualifications with teaching duties and responsibilities, and mentoring of new teachers by more experienced teachers and administrators.

Mentoring programs have steadily grown over the past two decades. With attrition being a perennial problem, administrators and educators have been motivated to find ways to curb high attrition rates and support teacher retention. One of the ways of addressing this problem has been through mentoring programs.

Ingersoll and May (2012), reported that in 1990, 51% of beginning teachers said that they had participated in mentoring programs. By 2007, that percentage had increased to 91%. Over the past five years, mentoring programs have been the focus of many research studies, given the positive outcomes being reported on the effects of these programs.

**Effect on Teacher Retention.**

A growing body of research has found that mentoring programs have a significant, positive effect on teacher retention and in supporting beginning teachers (Ganser, 2002; Kajs, 2002). In 2007, Kapadia et al. published research on mentoring programs in the Chicago Public Schools. They analyzed questionnaire data from 1,732 beginning teachers, of which 72% of the teachers were either in their first or second years. They found that the intensity and level of mentoring had an overall effect on the teachers’ likelihood to remain in the teaching profession or their specific school. The more activities and the stronger the intensity of the mentoring had a positive effect on beginning teacher retention.

Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found similar results as they analyzed the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey and Teacher Follow-Up Survey. They found that the retention rates increased as the amount of mentoring supports increased. Collaboration time with other teachers and having a mentor in the same content area were a few of the supports identified. In the National Center on Educational Statistic’s 2015 report, there was an approximate 10% difference in retention of early career teachers who were assigned mentors in their first year, as compared to
those not assigned a mentor. Those teachers who were assigned mentors were more likely to still be teaching after a year of mentoring.

**Effect on Student Achievement.**

Research has also shown that teacher retention has a positive effect on mentoring (Fletcher & Strong, 2009; Fletcher, Strong, & Villar, 2008; Rockoff, 2008). In one particular study (Adams, 2010), Alaskan beginning teachers who were mentored showed significant improvement in their student scores in mathematics, reading, writing, and science. In another study, Fletcher and Strong (2009) compared two sets of beginning teachers – those with full time mentors and those with part-time mentors. Of the two groups, the beginning teachers with full time mentors had greater student achievement than the group with part-time mentors. Similarly, Rockoff (2008) found that when the amount of time mentors spent with their mentees varied, those that had beginning teachers that received more mentoring time had students who had higher achievement on both English language arts and mathematics standardized tests.

The positive results that mentoring has shown on teacher retention, student achievement, and on teacher practice illustrate the need for more mentor programs in our schools.

**Mutual Benefits Model.**

Zey’s (1984) mutual benefits model has been referenced in research on mentoring (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). According to Zey, a mentor’s work is multi-faceted and encompasses many roles–roles such as: counselor, teacher, sponsor, and organizational intervenor. “It is clear that these functions provide solid benefits to the protégé [mentee]: knowledge, personal growth, protection, and career advancement” (p. 7). Thus, the role of the mentor in the life of a professional is an important piece to an employee’s success. Zey’s model proposes that a person’s needs are met upon entering a relationship, and that the relationship will continue as long as there is a benefit to each party. He believes that individual mentees, as well as their mentors benefit from the relationship, and that the organization, or in this case, the school establishment, is also benefiting from it as well.

This belief, as well as the research that has shown that mentoring programs increase teacher retention, increase student achievement, and have a positive effect on teacher practices, all support mentoring efforts and programs.

The research presented in this section illustrates the challenges that Title I schools have with teacher retention, student achievement and poverty. How do we retain teachers in schools...
with the challenges that Title I schools face? All students in Hawai‘i deserve the best educational environment. How do we provide them with teachers who stay for the long term? The design of this study will build on earlier research conducted by Harper (2009) on teacher retention. Understanding why teachers decide to remain teaching in Title I schools can have a positive impact on teacher retention. As a result, this understanding may also have a positive impact on student achievement.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods for this case study on teacher retention in three high needs Title I Hawai‘i schools. Firstly, the research question of the study will be shared, as well as the theoretical constructs, and the research design. The population and setting of the study, as well as the description and application of the sampling procedure will then be articulated. The description and justification of the instruments used for this research will be shared, as well as how the data was collected, analyzed, and reported. Finally, design issues, such as the limitations of the study, reliability, validity, and the generalizability of data will be explained.

Research Question

The research question is: What are the factors that influence the retention of teachers in high needs Title I schools in Hawai‘i?

Theoretical Frameworks

Two theoretical frames were chosen for this study. The first theoretical framework was based on James Price’s (2001) Causal Model of Voluntary Turnover, and the second was Chris Higgins’s (2003) Ethics of Teaching.

Price’s Causal Model of Turnover

Price’s Causal Model of Turnover, and versions of it, have been referenced in other studies on teacher turnover (Harper, 2009; Hasegawa, 2011; Ingersoll, 2011). This model of turnover (2001) proposes that there are 12 determinants, or factors, that affect one’s decision to leave an organization. The model was based on research conducted on the job satisfaction of nurses. In the case of this research, the organization was considered the school in which the teacher was employed. In addition to the 12 factors, there are four intervening variables: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, search behavior, and intent to stay that also impact employee turnover.

The teacher retention studies that have used this model have been quantitative in nature, however, this study used the model qualitatively. There are inherent problems with this, as the original model is causal in nature and was intended to be used quantitatively. Notwithstanding, the reasons that teachers remain in the profession can be analyzed using these factors that affect attrition are as follows:

1. Opportunity: the availability of alternate jobs;
2. Kinship responsibility: responsibility to relatives living within the community;
3. General training: the degree that the training received for employment is transferable to another job;
4. Job involvement: one’s inclination to exert effort in one’s employment;
5. Positive and negative affectivity: a person’s tendency to maintain positive or negative perspectives or emotions;
6. Autonomy: extent of one’s power over their job;
7. Distributive justice: employment related rewards or punishments;
8. Job stress: to the degree that one’s job responsibilities are difficult to accomplish;
9. Pay: money received for services;
10. Promotional chances: mobility within one’s employment;
11. Routinization: repetitiveness of one’s job;
12. Social Support: assistance with job related problems; three types have been identified—supervisory, peer (workgroup cohesion), and kinship (Price, 2001, p. 601–608).

In addition to the 12 factors, there are four intervening variables: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, search behavior, and intent to stay that also impact employee turnover. Job satisfaction is defined as the degree to which employees enjoy their work. Organizational commitment is considered the amount of fidelity or loyalty one has to his/her employer. Job satisfaction and organizational (job) commitment are variables that affect one’s intention to remain in their job, or their intent to stay. Intent to stay is defined as the aim or attitude about remaining in one’s employment. According to Price’s model, these factors are among those that influence employee turnover negatively, thus influencing retention positively. Search behavior, or the extent that an employee is searching for a job, was not considered a factor, as the assumption of the research was that the participating teachers intended to remain in their schools. The model was used to understand what reasons influence the retention of teachers in high needs Title I schools. Specific variables that focused on employee retention from Price’s Causal Model were used as a lens to analyze the themes that emerged from the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts for this study, in order to understand the factors that help to retain teachers in their Title I schools.
Higgins’ Ethics of Teaching.

The second framework that was used for this study was Higgins’s (2003) Ethics of Teaching. The Ethics of Teaching is Higgins’ belief system about teachers and their embodiment of the profession and how it presents itself in their own lives. This is not a theory, per se, but Higgins’ belief. Higgins’ beliefs on the Ethics of Teaching are not concrete factors as is Price’s model. On the contrary, the Ethics of Teaching are affective in nature and encompass the feelings of fulfillment and include the reasons why teachers teach, or have chosen the profession. Higgins’ beliefs focus on the intrinsic reasons why teachers teach and the mutual benefit of the profession to the teacher and to the student. This belief system was chosen as another lens to understand the factors that keep teachers teaching in Title I schools, as it would add another layer of understanding to teacher retention—why teachers choose the profession, and if those are factors that keep them in it.

Higgins believes that “the practice of teaching contributes to the flourishing of the teacher” (p. 131). The focus is on why the “activity of teaching is worthwhile to the teacher” (p. 134). Higgins’s assumption is that teaching fulfills the teacher and encourages his or her own growth as a person. Higgins says that “tending to the growth of others nourishes the teacher’s own growth, because the … practice of teaching is itself …part of a teacher’s quest to lead a good life” (p.135). However, Higgins also asserts that although teaching is thought of as a selfless profession, and clearly one of service, teachers often leave the profession because of this “ascetic ideal”—often sacrificing much for their classrooms, students, and profession burnt out without honoring themselves in the process. With this in consideration, Higgins asserts that successful teachers who remain in the field will not only be selfless, but also self-serving and self-cultivating, “enrich[ing] themselves through their pedagogy” (p. 153). This ethic was another perspective in which to view themes that emerged from the data, as teachers have historically been perceived as selfless, caring, and nurturing people, who choose the profession in the search of a meaningful life.

The data was analyzed using these frameworks as a lens to understand teacher retention. Higgins asserts that it makes sense to find out what teachers “want, need, and derive from their practice, and to view such questions as ethical in nature” (p. 137). Teaching is a profession often motivated by more than extrinsic factors, but also by intrinsic and ethical determinants.
Setting

This study’s participants were all teachers within one State of Hawai‘i Department of Education public school complex on the island of O‘ahu. This particular study’s participants were teachers from one elementary, one intermediate, and one high school’s complex. All schools were identified as Title I schools by the federal government. The community in which the schools were located was considered to be an area of high poverty, or economically disadvantaged.

In order to keep the identities of the schools and teachers confidential, the setting will be briefly and generally described. The community in which the complex schools are located is considered to be an area of high poverty, or economically disadvantaged. In the 2012-2013 school year, the percentage of students within the three participating schools receiving free or reduced lunch was more than 70%. Each year since 2010 the percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals across the three schools has risen. This was an indicator of the economic health of the community.

In terms of student achievement, the secondary students within the complex performed significantly lower than the state average on both mathematics and reading state assessments, with the exception of one grade level doing better on the mathematics assessment than the state average. The elementary school had similar results, with all reading assessment scores significantly lower than the state average, and two of their grade levels scoring significantly lower on their mathematics assessment as well. Two grade levels, on the other hand, scored slightly better than their state counterparts in mathematics (Hawaii State DOE, 2011).

Teacher retention in this community has been a challenge. Over the last five years, the three participating schools’ collective hiring and subsequent teacher attrition rates for those specific new hires were as follows:
Table 1. Teacher Attrition of Participating Schools’ New Hires from 2008-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of New Hires</th>
<th>Left after 1 year</th>
<th>Left after 2 years</th>
<th>Left after 3 years</th>
<th>Left after 4 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hawai‘i State Department of Education Office of Human Resources, December 15, 2014

The figure illustrates the large amount of teachers that left the participating schools over the last few years. Of the 31 teachers hired in 2008, only seven remained longer than 5 years. The number of hires fluctuated each year, with the lowest number of 14 in 2009. Of those 14, four remained longer than 5 years. Most recently in 2012, 27 teachers were hired and of them, six chose to leave after their first year. According to the data, 10-28% of the teachers left after their first year of teaching, and 18% left after 3 years of teaching. This data does not consider the teachers who had been hired before 2008 that also chose to leave the school during these specified years. This data only represents new hire employment for the past 5 years.

The brief description of the setting indicates the economic, academic, and teacher retention challenges of the schools participating in the study.

**Research Paradigm**

This study employed a multiple case study design. Individual teachers’ experiences working in high needs Title I schools were explored in depth. “Case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system (Smith, 1978) such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community” (Merriam, 2001, p. 19). The case studies presented within this research were bound by type of school: low SES schools, as identified by their Title I status. In the 2012-2013 school year, the state of Hawai‘i employed approximately 11,000 teachers (Hawai‘i State DOE Office of the Superintendent, 2014). This study on teacher retention, if done large-scale with the entire population considered, would have needed to be done quantitatively. However, teachers’ experiences and their employment decisions were unable to be fully explored in a quantitative study. Interviews and discussions with teacher participants were central to
understanding their employment experiences. Case studies explain the “why” or “how” of a phenomenon and enable the researcher to go more in depth than a quantitative study (Yin, 2009). A real strength of case studies is that the phenomenon being studied is “anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (Merriam, 2001, p. 41). Case studies can give the researcher a greater understanding of the participants’ thoughts and give rich descriptions and context to their lived experiences. When analyzed, these thoughts can result in tentative hypotheses or theories that can help to add to the body of knowledge on the research topic. The goal of the case study is to generalize theories and expand on past research (Merriam, 2001). Case study design was chosen with the purpose of exploring the participants’ lived experiences as teachers in high needs Title I schools.

In order to get varied perspectives on the research focus, multiple case studies, or cross-case analysis will be used. Multiple case studies

... involve[s] collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or subcases embedded within … The more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be. ‘By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings. (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 29)

Merriam (2001) states, “The inclusion of multiple cases is, in fact, a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings” (p. 40).

There were three ways in which the cases were identified for this study. The first was as one whole case of 10 teacher participants from the same school complex. In particular instances, there were differences in responses and experiences between secondary and elementary teachers, as well as differences in early career and veteran teachers. The differing themes that emerged from those two particular cases were reported within the themes in the results in Chapter 4.

Two recent dissertations, one quantitative study conducted in Hawai‘i (Hasegawa, 2011) and one mixed-methods study conducted in Mississippi (Harper, 2009) focused on the topic of teacher retention. However, what was lacking in both studies was an in-depth exploration of the reasons that teachers remain in the profession. In her discussion chapter, Harper states, “a more
detailed explanation can be gained through conducting interviews with focus groups and individual teachers. Doing this could provide specific examples of real issues that contribute to teacher retention” (Harper, 2009, p. 116). When researchers desire to explain the “why” or “how” of a phenomenon, qualitative methods are used.

In light of this need for more in-depth and complex studies on teacher retention, this multiple case study research design was an appropriate and valid method to investigate teacher retention.

**Population and Participant Description**

Because of the small numbers of teacher participants, and the limited number of schools participating in this study, the description of the teacher participants and the schools were kept general and brief. The researcher did not describe teachers or schools in detail as it might have revealed too much information and anonymity would have been lost. Within the literature review, the general nature of Title I schools and issues about poverty, education, and teacher retention were addressed to provide a general understanding about the schools and teachers involved in this study.

**Purposive sampling.**

Purposive sampling, or criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) was used in choosing the participants for this study. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher “wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2001, p. 61). The first step in applying purposive sampling is to define the selection criteria of the participants. For the purpose of this research, it was initially proposed that 15 participants would be selected from 2 career groups: 6 early career teachers and 9 veteran teachers. All teachers would be selected from low SES schools, as identified by the school’s Title I status. However, due to challenges in recruitment, 10 teachers participated, rather than the 15 originally intended.

In order to get a broad teaching perspective, the participants were selected using the following criteria for each career group: early career teachers having 3-6 years of experience, and veteran teachers having 7 or more years of teaching experience.

Teachers between 0-2 years were not initially considered. They do not have the option to voluntarily transfer to another school, and are still working through their first years of understanding and acclimating themselves to the culture of the school, community and the
students, as well as establishing their own teaching style and experimenting with ways to organize and structure their classrooms (Huberman, 1989). As well, a large number of teachers leave the profession within their first few years of teaching (Chang, 2009; Changying, 2007; Hong, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Because of this, interviewing teachers who may have passed this delicate time in their careers would give better insight to factors that have affected their decisions to remain in the teaching profession within high needs Title I schools. However, over the course of the recruitment phase, the opportunity emerged to interview one first year teacher whom was thought to have wanted to remain at her school. Over the course of her interview, it became clear that she had hoped to transfer to another school when the opportunity arose. Unexpectedly, the data collected from her interview was valuable in understanding the perspective of someone who was having a contrasting experience from the other teachers who chose to remain at their schools.

Veteran teachers were identified as those who have worked for seven or more years. These are teachers that have worked through their initial career challenges and are comfortable with their teaching. They have passed the “Survival” and “Discovery” stages (1-3 years), and have also passed the 4-6 year “Stabilization” stage (Huberman, 1989). By this time in a teacher’s career, the teacher has established him/herself and is comfortable in their teaching style, practice and pedagogy.

Twenty-one teachers were contacted for possible participation in the study: 12 secondary and 9 elementary teachers. The years of service criteria mentioned above was used in the selection process, and potential participants were also selected with consideration of: 1) recommendations and referrals from university colleagues, 2) recommendations by school administrators, 3) teaching awards, advanced degrees or certifications received, or 4) were recommended by administrators and university colleagues. Although administrators and university colleagues offered the teacher recommendations, recruitment and the consenting participant list was kept confidential.

**Participant description.**

The participants were representative of elementary (grades K-6), intermediate (grades 7-8), and high school (grades 9-12) teachers for each career group—early career, and veteran teachers. Of the total 21 teachers that were contacted, 10 teachers showed interest in and agreed to participate in the study: six veteran teachers from three Title I schools, and 4 early career
teachers from two of the same Title I schools. The participants were six Title I elementary school teachers, one Title I intermediate school teacher, and three Title I high school teachers. The teacher participants either taught in Title I schools for the majority of their careers, the Title I school being their most current experience, whether that be: a) voluntary transfer from one Title I school to another, b) being initially hired at a Title I school and voluntarily staying there, or c) transferring from a non-Title I school to a Title I school. The following chart describes the years of experience of the participants.

Table 2. Study Participants’ Teaching Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early Career</th>
<th>Early Career</th>
<th>Veteran</th>
<th>Veteran</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>3-6 years</td>
<td>7-15 years</td>
<td>16 + years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades K-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grades 7-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 9-2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one intermediate teacher participant taught in both the intermediate school and high school settings. As her experience was in both school levels, and she considered herself to be a secondary teacher, she was included in what will now be referred to the “secondary teacher group”. Thus, the participants will, from here, be identified as either “elementary” or “secondary” teachers.

Of the ten participants, seven were considered “local” or Hawai‘i resident teachers who grew up in Hawai‘i, with Hawai‘i resident status most, if not all, of their lives. One of the seven local teachers grew up in the particular community of her school, but did not reside there during her employment. The remaining six local teachers grew up in O‘ahu communities outside of their school. The other three “non-local” participants moved to Hawai‘i for one of the following reasons: 1) recruited to teach for the Hawai‘i DOE, 2) hoped to get hired for a teaching position in Hawai‘i, or 3) attended the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa for graduate school. Thus, the participant pool included teachers with differing backgrounds and experiences, both in and out of the community of their school of employment.
Although the participant size of this study is small, the criterion used to determine the participants intended to give a broader perspective than if all participants had been from the same school or school level.

**Participant Recruitment**

Potential participants were contacted by email, which included a recruitment flyer to inform them about the study, as well as to inquire if the subjects would be interested in participating. When subjects indicated interest in participating in the study, consent forms for early career and veteran teachers (Appendix A) were sent to the potential subjects.

As a result of an unexpected scholarship award for this research, participants were offered a $20.00 gift card in appreciation for their participation in this study. It was clearly stated on the consent form to the participants that if they chose to halt participation in the study at any time, they would not be required to return the gift card. They were able to choose a gift card from Starbucks, amazon.com, or Long’s Drug Store (CVS).

**Participant Confidentiality**

Due to the limited population of study participants and the limited number of schools they represented, anonymity of the participants was of the highest priority. In order to keep the participants’ identities confidential, their only descriptors within this paper were of what school level (elementary or secondary) they taught, and whether they were an early career or veteran teacher. The gender of some of the participants was purposely changed throughout the reporting of the results to avoid any further identification of the teachers within their schools. Individuals were not described or identified other than in the aforementioned ways.

**Consideration of Human Subjects and Hawai’i State Department of Education Consent to Conduct Research**

In consideration of human subjects, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted and subsequently approved by the University of Hawai‘i’s Institutional Review Board. Approval was granted on July 10, 2014 (Appendix B). As well, an application to conduct research was submitted to the State of Hawai‘i Department of Education’s Data Governance Office and approval was received on November 21, 2014 (Appendix C).
Methods for Collecting Data

**Survey.**

Once consent forms were returned, a survey (Appendix D) was sent to each of the participants. The survey’s intent was to gather sociodemographic information: age, education, and employment history of each participant. A survey “provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2009, p. 234). This initial survey provided information on the participants’ education and work experiences. The survey was administered between the months of January 2015 through March 2015.

**Semi-structured interviews.**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were utilized to explore the teachers’ perspectives and their interpretation of their world (Merriam, 2001, p. 72). In-depth interviews allowed each participant to share his/her opinions and insights (Yin, 2009, p. 107) on their decision to remain teaching in a high needs Title I school. The semi-structured interview questions were guided by the topic of teacher retention in relationship to factors that have influenced them to remain teaching, but were also structured so that participants could share their worldview, opinions and insights.

One semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the 10 teacher participants to explore the factors that affected their decisions to remain teaching at their schools. The interviews were conducted between January and February of 2015. The interview questions encompassed discussion about: teachers’ employment within their particular school and community, their perceptions about the students, families and community they work with, their teaching challenges and successes, the types of support they receive, their perceptions about teacher turnover, their suggestions to combat the issue of teacher retention in their schools, and their future career plans. See Appendix E for the semi-structured interview questions for each career group.

**Focus group.**

Once data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed and coded, two focus groups, consisting of three participants each, were conducted to gather more data in a different setting and format. The intent of the focus group was to extend the discussion on factors affecting participants’ desire to remain teaching in their schools. “Researchers choose focus
group interviews to collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people. A focus group interview is the process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 258).

All 10 teacher participants were invited to participate in a focus group in March 2015. Of the 10 teachers, six were able to, or chose to participate. Three elementary teachers participated in the first focus group, and three secondary teachers participated in the next. The intent was to have both elementary and secondary teachers participate in focus groups together, but the participants’ schedules did not align accordingly. It also happened that the elementary teachers were available on the same day, and the secondary teachers were available on the same day. Although the intent was that the focus groups would encompass both elementary and secondary participants to have a wider perspective within each discussion, the composition of the groupings made for comfortable interaction as the participants of each focus group were of the same school level and were familiar with each other already, having taught in the same schools.

Themes that emerged from the semi-structured teacher interviews were addressed during the focus groups in an attempt to validate the experiences of all participants. The researcher shared the themes and common factors that were uncovered during the first set of interviews so that participants had an opportunity to discuss these and other factors that may or may not have also influenced their employment decisions. The focus group discussions also allowed participants to engage with perspectives and issues that they may not have considered in their initial interviews. As the veteran participants had been teaching for a longer period of time, events, factors, and feelings that they experienced in the earlier part of their careers may have been forgotten and this was the opportunity for them to think about and comment on any of the factors and issues that emerged in the first interview by the early career participants. The different themes that emerged between the two school level groups were also discussed during the focus groups. The focus group questions for each respective group are found in Appendix F.

During the second focus group, a rolling interview guide was used. The rolling interview is “based on the outcome of the first group discussion, the guide is revised for use in the second group” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015, p. 70). The disadvantage to this method is that the same questions are not asked of the different focus groups and comparisons are more difficult to make. However, it takes into consideration the information and issues that emerge during an earlier
focus group to address other considerations and topics that might not have been discussed. Thus, the questions used for each focus group are slightly different.

Artifact sharing.

As part of the semi-structured interview, teacher participants were asked to bring an artifact that was related to their teaching career—something that represented their career or had special meaning to their teaching experience. For the purposes of this study, the artifact was a way to understand what the teacher found value in, in their teaching experience. Physical artifacts have been used widely in anthropological research. In many studies they may not provide much relevant data. However, in this particular study, the artifact represented the valued experiences the teachers have had in their careers—possibly ones that have made an impact on their decision to remain in the profession. Yin (2009) comments that in one particular case study, physical artifacts gave the researcher a wider perspective of the research topic than what a field observation would have provided. The themes extracted from the physical artifacts and the explanation of them by the participants supported triangulation of the data gathered from the interview and focus group discussion and validated or invalidated their responses about their beliefs about teaching, their valued experiences and what may or may not keep them teaching in their school. Upon sharing of their artifacts, the teachers were asked two questions: “What is your artifact?”, and “What is the significance of this artifact to your teaching experience?” According to Knowles and Cole (2008), “Arts-informed research is a way of redefining research form and representation and creating new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions or inquiry” (p.59). The artifacts were physical representations of the teachers’ experiences in the profession—symbolizing their philosophies, values, character, and what influenced them to remain teaching in their schools. Within the results, artifacts were discussed as part of the themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups. Thus, not all artifacts were reported, but those that supported the study’s themes were shared.

Methods for Coding and Analyzing Data

Explanation building was the within-case analytic strategy used for each individual case. “… the goal is to analyze the case study data by building an explanation about the case. … to ‘explain’ a phenomenon is to stipulate a presumed set of causal links about it, or ‘how’ or ‘why’ something happened” (Yin, 2009, p. 141).
The data collected was analyzed by identifying codes within the interviews and focus groups. From those codes, themes were extracted. There were a number of coding iterations during the data analysis.

In order to code the data, the researcher transcribed each interview and focus group. The transcriptions for each individual participant were then placed into spreadsheets that allowed the researcher to identify main points, codes, and themes across all participants, specific to the interview questions and topics discussed. The researcher then identified larger themes derived from the codes. Within the transcription, color codes and letter and number identifiers were used to indicate who the participant was so the researcher could easily identify interview or focus group statements by individual participant.

The individual case studies were then analyzed across cases, using cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2009). Cross-case synthesis is a technique in which there are more than one case study to be examined, considering each case study as a separate study (p.156). The collected data for each school group was considered a separate case study, where differing responses were discussed within the themes. As well, each career group’s differing responses within the themes were discussed if applicable. Themes extracted from the initial analysis of each case study were compared and analyzed across cases.

Data was analyzed for common and discrepant themes amongst and across the two career groups (early and veteran teachers), as well as across the two different school level groups (elementary and secondary teachers). In this study, most responses were similar for the entire participant population. Thus, the discrepant responses and themes were discussed when applicable.

**Methods for Reliability and Validity**

**Member check.**

After the transcription and coding of the first set of interviews and the focus groups, member check documents were created and given to each participant in person in hard copy, or in electronic copy through email. According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2010), the member check verifies the accuracy of the study findings verbally or in writing. During a member check, the participants are asked if the findings are “complete and realistic, the themes are accurate, and the interpretations are fair and representative” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 287). The member check documents for each participant included a transcription of the
participant’s semi-structured interview and focus group discussion with an analysis of themes and the researcher’s interpretation for each. All participants approved their member check documents in writing or verbally for this study.

Some participants were unable to complete their interviews due to time constraints. In those cases, they agreed to answer the remaining interview questions through email exchange. All participants who were given written questions completed their responses and emailed them back to the researcher.

**Triangulation.**

The data was triangulated through the analysis of the artifacts, interviews, and focus group discussion on the topic of teacher retention. The participants were presented with multiple opportunities to share their lived experiences as teachers and their understandings of their professional world. Yin (2009) argues that a major strength of case studies is the opportunity to use a variety of data sources.

The use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues… most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidences is the development of *converging lines of inquiry*, a process of triangulation and corroboration…. any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode. (Yin, 2009, p. 115–116)

**Reliability.**

In “explaining the assumptions and theory underlying the study, by triangulating data, and by leaving an audit trail, that is, by describing in detail how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived from the data” (Merriam, 2001, p.218), a researcher ensures reliability. In order to ensure reliability for this study, the theory and assumptions basing the study were clearly stated so there was no question about the researcher’s perspective and biases. The researcher checked that codes and themes were clear and consistent across cases, and transcripts were reviewed by participants for accuracy (Creswell, 2009).

**Validity.**

Validity is defined as “how well the research findings match reality” (Merriam, 2001, p. 201). In order to ensure validity of a study, Merriam lists six strategies to consider: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes
of research, and researcher’s biases. For the purposes of this study, all the listed strategies were used except for long-term observation and participatory or collaborative modes of research. Multiple sources of data were used to triangulate or understand more holistically the factors affecting teacher retention. Member checks were conducted throughout the coding and analysis process. Also, peers were asked to comment on findings as they emerged from the data, comparing the researcher’s initial findings with others’, as well conducting peer debriefings, which helped with the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009). As also similarly stated in the reliability section, the researcher’s biases and theoretical assumptions were also clearly shared with peers and participants.

**Method of Reporting Data**

As was done in this study, researchers will often write up multiple case studies by covering the explanatory topics or themes, rather than assigning each case to a separate section. Individual cases, summaries of cases, or vignettes were dispersed throughout the report, giving support to a topic or theme that emerged from the data collection (Yin, 2009).

An unsequenced structure of writing was utilized, where there was no particular order of importance in the sections. The challenge in using an unsequenced writing structure is that the researcher needs to ensure that the research shared is complete and to avoid missing any topics or analysis (Yin, 2009).

**Limitations**

Due to the nature of the case study and focus group designs, a small sample size was used. Only 10 teachers were interviewed, and only six teachers participated in the focus groups. Thus, the research was limited to a small participant group and the findings were not generalizable to a larger teacher population.

As well, this study was specific to three high needs Title I schools in Hawai‘i. Thus, a limitation of this study was in the applicability and generalizability of the findings to any other school, and in particular, any non-Title I school.

**Assumptions**

This study was based on a number of assumptions. It was assumed that the teacher participants had opportunities to voluntarily leave their school to work in different school settings but had chosen to remain where they were. It was also assumed that teachers formed social bonds and relationships with staff and faculty members, which was a form of support in
their work in their schools. Other assumptions were that teachers formed relationships with their students, that the teachers were nurturing and caring people, and intrinsic rewards, such as these, were important to them. These bonds, relationships and nurturing tendencies motivated teachers in their decisions to work in their schools. It was also assumed that there were challenges that each of the participants faced and they found ways to successfully overcome them throughout their careers. Another assumption was that participants were honest in their survey responses and interviews and that the researcher was objective throughout the process of the study.

**Role of the Researcher**

I am aware of and disclose my biases here as the researcher in this study. As shared in Chapter 1, my experience as a former elementary school teacher in a Title I school within the Hawai‘i DOE, gave me insight and “insider” experiences within the teaching profession. My personal experience teaching in a Title I school in Hawai‘i influenced my research topic, as well as my collection and analysis of the data. My overall positive experiences working in and with Title I schools lent me to have a positive outlook on the teachers, students, and communities of Title I schools. I also hold particular beliefs about teachers, the profession, and Title I schools and students that influence my perception of the data. Reflecting on my own teaching experiences and former colleagues, I believe that teachers are hard working, moral people, who decide to teach for reasons other than money and recognition. Teachers choose to teach because they have an intrinsic desire to help others— to help children. They want to “make a difference” with their lives and have chosen teaching because they are able to affect the future of their community, country, and world, by affecting children.

Also, as a faculty member at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s (UH-Mānoa) College of Education (COE), I also have insight and experiences with teacher candidates who are being prepared for the Hawai‘i DOE schools. Having worked in the COE since 2008, I have had the opportunity to see our college graduates as they acclimate and transition themselves into the teaching profession. Their experiences and insights have afforded me the opportunity to witness their successes and challenges within their first years of teaching.

Another of my responsibilities at UH-Mānoa is working in the university’s new initiative, Supporting Our New Graduates (SONG). The SONG initiative is

Committed to teacher success and provides support to UHM (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa) graduates in a variety of areas including curriculum, instruction and classroom
management in their first two years of teaching. Services are free of charge and may be provided in person or on-line by university faculty. SONG support services are in addition to the induction and mentoring guidance provided by HIDOE to all beginning teachers. (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa College of Education, n.d.)

The College of Education Dean, Dr. Donald Young, envisioned this support system for graduates. The College of Education is committed to our partnership with the Department of Education. We share a common goal to support teacher effectiveness. I am confident that our faculty prepare our graduates well and we pledge our continuing support to help each become and confident, successful, and highly effective teacher. (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa College of Education, n.d.)

My work on this initiative aligns with my belief that support for our college graduates and beginning teachers is important to their success.

The aforementioned experiences influence my interpretation and understanding of the study data. However, my objective in this study is to have a better, deeper understanding of teacher retention in Title I schools so that schools will be better equipped to support their teachers. Although I have my own biases, I kept my biases in check as I reminded myself of my objective to deeply understand teacher retention in order to help Title I schools and students.

So that I acknowledged my perspectives and biases, colleagues and other researchers were asked to review the protocols for the interviews and focus groups prior to the meetings. Colleagues and other researchers were also asked to review the interview and focus group codes and themes after analysis. As well, participants each reviewed their interview and focus group transcripts. The codes and themes were included in the member check documents. All participants were asked to approve of the documents and/or share their feedback with me so that any misconceptions were corrected.

The topic of teacher retention is complex and multi-faceted. In order to get a complex, deeper understanding of why teachers remained in the profession and to explore their lived experiences, a multiple case study research design and the methods discussed were utilized in understanding this issue.
Chapter 4: Results

This chapter identifies the results of this study on teacher retention, answering the research question: What are the factors that influence the retention of teachers in high needs Title I schools in Hawai‘i?

Semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and participant artifacts were the data collected for this study. Data was analyzed and coded for themes. The following themes emerged: making a difference, teachers’ relationships with students, teachers’ relationships with fellow teachers, administrative support and vision, and teachers’ perspectives.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the identities of the schools and teacher participants were kept confidential. Due to the small participant population and the small number of schools of employment, there was no description given of the participants other than their school level and length of work experience. To further ensure anonymity, the gender of the teachers were intermittently changed throughout the reporting of the results and in the discussion chapter.

The results of the study were reported by theme, and participant responses were grouped by their school level employment–elementary or secondary (intermediate and high school), or career grouping (early career and veteran teacher) only if significant differences emerged from the respective responses. Otherwise, the themes were reported in general, with the entire teacher participant group as one case study. If there were significant differences in response by early career or mid to veteran teachers, within the school level analysis, they were noted and results were segregated and reported in this form as needed. Thus, most of the results are written as a single case study unless significant findings emerged by school level group or career group.

Making a Difference

That's the biggest reason teachers become teachers is to make a difference.

And if you want to make a difference, this is one of the best places you could be to make a difference. –Early Career Teacher

Self-efficacy was a theme that was implied throughout the interviews, focus groups, and artifact conversations. Self-efficacy, or one’s effectiveness, was a strong characteristic of all the teachers, with the exception of the most beginning teacher. The teachers identified the ways in which they felt they were effective in student success, overall school progress, or in mentoring pre-service teachers. The ways in which they articulated this was in their discussions about
“making a difference.” A related theme that emerged was that of acknowledgement. Teachers all shared that they appreciated and valued being acknowledged in a variety of ways. This validated that their work had made a difference.

**School and Student Progress.**

All 10 teachers shared that the academic progress of their students was an indicator that they had made a difference. The elementary teachers not only shared that their students were an indication of this, but the overall academic progress of their school was also an indicator.

**Student character development and citizenship.**

The elementary and secondary teachers all mentioned that making a difference with students was a primary professional objective. Having felt the sense of making a difference and having seen the effect they had on students were important factors in teachers’ decisions to remain teaching in their schools. In particular, all teachers said they had made a difference by helping to develop “good people,” or affecting character development in their students. A few teachers also discussed how their work affected the larger community and state.

Nine of the ten teachers identified their part in developing “good people,” “good citizens,” or “contributing members of society” as a way that they had made a difference in the classroom. They felt that developing students with good character made a difference to the individual students, their families, the school, and the community. They identified different ways in which this was done. Five of the teachers said that they had been role models to students, in their efforts to develop students into contributing members of society.

> In this community, there are not always positive role models, so being here to show my kids that I care about them and to be a role model is important to me. As soon as I turn off [street], I'm already on stage, waving to a familiar family, having good driving habits and letting kids pass by–it's demonstrating respect–using kind language, and being consistent and telling kids when things are not appropriate.

Another teacher shared her professional goals,

> People always wonder why I work here. My role is to help the students see more than what's in their day to day life. To give them hope and skills to do different things. ...

> Teaching is a form of activism. ... It's teaching new citizens to be kind to one another, it's teaching them thinking skills. I can't see myself doing much of anything else.
An early career elementary teacher stated how she felt she made a difference, “I do really enjoy that I’m making a difference to my students and to the community and showing and modeling being a good person to them—modeling caring and compassion.” A veteran elementary teacher described his role,

*I feel like I'm making small strides in [community] and in general, for Hawai‘i as a whole ... I want to see that students become responsible adults and take care of Hawai‘i. ... As in, they grow up to be respectful people in the world and to be good to others, the environment, and make good choices later on. ... I believe that the key to a better Hawai‘i is through the youth. I want them to be good people, working in the state, city and county, as lawmakers, ... instead of for selfish needs, and I want them to see the problems and want to fix them instead of creating them.*

This teacher felt that his activism and efforts to develop students’ character in positive ways would eventually have an impact and make a difference in the community, Hawai‘i, and the larger world. This factor motivated his work at his school.

Another teacher said,

*My goal is to make good kids. ... These kids will go out, do what they do and then come back to live here. Chances are I may have these kids' kids. I want them to be good kids. I hope they're going to do good things. I want to set up the community for success in the long run. I hope the 500 kids I've already worked with will be able come back and do well for this community.*

The teachers above felt that their work made a difference by helping their students, and also the community by developing “good people” who they hoped would return to their community to make a positive impact.

**Student academic and behavioral success.**

Students’ improvement in their academics was one way that teachers measured that they had made a difference. A veteran elementary teacher described the tendency for the students at her Title I school to have challenging social, behavioral, economic, and academic issues.

*Behaviors are always an issue. We have a lot of foster children who have a lot of issues and baggage at home. And, also the fact that they come in so low. We have kids coming in that don't know what regular 2-3 year olds know. We need to start at the beginning [in both academics and behavior].*
Because of this trend, teachers needed to work harder on academics and classroom management. When asked to share a success that she had, one elementary veteran teacher shared excitedly, “Last year, 70% of my students passed the [assessment].” She felt this was a clear indicator that she had made a difference academically with her students. She also shared that it was a difficult task, and “sometimes I want to throw in the towel. But when the kids get it, I think ‘Woohoo!’” For this teacher, the amount of work was worth the effort when she saw the growth in her students. One elementary early career teacher explained,

> Every year when the students are able to read, it's always a success. They're able to read all these books they couldn't read before. Parents come in and say "thank you for helping them learn to read, because in kindergarten they weren't able to."

Understandably, all teachers felt successful when students’ academics improved.

As well as making an impact on their students’ academic success, all teachers shared their challenges with student behavior and classroom management. Within their classroom walls, seven of the teachers felt this was their primary challenge. However, despite this challenge, the teachers all recognized that when they affected positive change in their students’ behaviors, it was welcomed relief to have a better classroom environment, and to have been the positive influence in this change.

One early career elementary teacher, who reflected on her immense curriculum and classroom management challenges in her first year of teaching, said “I've come a long way in building relationships with students. I know how to deal with certain behavioral issues better now.” She then described,

> There was a student with a few incidents. I talked to him about trust and how I need to trust him ... and talked to him about integrity and making good choices. My relationship with him is strong now. I'm proud of him—I feel like I can trust him. I feel like he could have been a real troublemaker, but he's good now!

This teacher went on to share how she placed effort into the relationship with her student—“talking story” with him during the day, praising him for his successes, and getting to

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1 “Talking story” is a pidgin term used to denote casual conversation.
know him and discussing his progress with his parents. She felt successful in turning around his behavior. The other five elementary teachers had similar stories of success in affecting positive change in student behavior.

The secondary teachers also identified behavioral issues as challenges in the intermediate and high school settings. In particular, they felt that students were not engaged or motivated in their classes, which was a factor in their misbehavior. Because of this, the secondary teachers spent much effort in creating curriculum that changed the students’ attitudes. All four secondary teachers identified relevant and hands-on instruction as a way they got students more in tune with the classroom curriculum. “I try to do a lot of group work because it not only addresses academics, but it touches on their social and emotional skills and talents,” “Kids get bored, stations are good and labs work well because they are hands on, … I try to make learning project based and place based. It makes the curriculum more relevant and kids are more engaged.” All secondary teachers agreed that when they witnessed improvement in student behavior, they knew that they had influenced their students. They had made a difference.

School success.

All six elementary teachers talked about their role in the academic progress and success of their school. Besides the teachers, contributing to the progress of the school were the organizational structures, as well as the leadership by administration. A veteran teacher shared her experience at a school wide faculty meeting and learning of the academic level of the students,

I remember being at a faculty meeting when I first started. The principal was showing the HSA scores and the scores were so low that there was no color on the graph. It was a white paper because we only had 7% of the students passing. Since I've been there and being part of the growth and progress of the school, it makes leaving hard.

She then shared, “I just learned today that we have a wait list to get in to our school– people want their kids to come to [school]. That would have never happened before.” She stated that because she was a part of the progress of the school and the movement forward to bring up the academic levels of the students, it was difficult to leave. She also described two other veteran teachers who each lived between 30-40 miles away from the school that continued to teach there because “they also have felt that they’ve been a part of a positive change for the school and the community.”
Another teacher explained one of the factors that contributed to this progress,

Now, we have a reading program and it's getting the kids to read. I had a parent come in and said that her son is reading and that she can't read but that her child is reading (teacher cries). I had another parent say that she wanted to transfer her child to our school because she knows he will learn to read at our school.

These moments validated the teachers’ work and demonstrated that they had contributed to the progress of the school, which was a factor that kept them teaching there.

The secondary teachers did not mention this topic in their interviews.

Projects and programs.

Elementary and secondary teachers felt that one other way they had made a difference in their schools was through school programs and projects with students.

One veteran secondary teacher, who was a project advisor for many years shared that she felt that her work on this annual project made a difference to both herself and her students. “The [project] gave me more fulfillment because it wasn't only working on it, but it was the completed product we had at the end of the year.” One significant experience with a student validated her relationship with the student, as well as the difference she made in the student's skills and leadership.

[The student] was having a problem with her family, so she transferred to [another school] and lived with her father's family. I thought that I wasn't doing a good job of teaching the kids. She took [class] at [new school], and she came to visit me and told me that all the things she knew that her class didn't even know about and hadn't learned. She was teaching the kids at her school all the things she knew, so the teacher [gave her a leadership role]. It made me feel good. When she shared that with me, I felt like I was on the right track. That's the good thing you feel when kids come back. You can't ever gauge how well you're doing.

As will be discussed in an upcoming section on student relationships, visits by former students validated teachers’ work and their relationships with them. This visit by a former student was a prime example of this and in the teacher’s understanding that she had made a difference for this student and was doing valuable work.

Another veteran teacher created and sustained the booster club at his school. He was tasked to do this as part of his job responsibilities, and when it was accomplished, he felt
satisfaction and that he had made a difference to the school, students and extra curricular programs. The booster club continued even after he had given up that responsibility. He saw the difference he made in the creation, progress, and the sustaining of the program.

Another veteran elementary teacher identified her development of the school’s promotion ceremony as a big accomplishment and was a legacy that she left for the school.

*Our school did not have a 6th grade promotion ceremony, and I thought it was important. I put it together and when it was done, my 6th grade coworker said it turned out wonderful and perfect. It became something we do every year now. A lot of work went into it. It's easy now and the kids need that recognition of achievement.*

The teacher made a difference to that graduating class, all future classes, and to the school.

An early career secondary teacher listed a number of ways that he felt he made a difference through his class projects and work with students. He worked with students after school, took them on weekend field trips where students were expected to make connections to what they had learned in their classrooms, and put on hō’ike (sharing of knowledge) where they presented projects for community members and their families. He also collaborated with community organizations on school-based projects. The community organizations helped with funding, resources, and expertise, “[the organizations] helped us to make [the projects] a reality.” The teacher shared that these experiences affected the students’ involvement and enjoyment in their studies. He said that a student had recently told him, “‘I really hated [subject] until I had you’ and now she's my top student in my AP class!”

These successful projects and programs affected the elementary and secondary early career and veteran teachers’ feelings of success and their voice in their schools. The projects were valued indicators that they had made a difference with students and in their schools. These validating experiences influenced their desire to continue teaching at their schools.

**Mentoring.**

Five of the six elementary teachers both early career and veteran mentored pre-service teachers at their school. All but one elementary teacher shared positive experiences with mentoring. The five teachers felt that they made a difference for their pre-service teachers and also benefited personally from mentoring. Three of the teachers, ranging between 5 to 20 years of experience, indicated that they wanted to continue mentoring as part of their own professional goals and professional development.
I liked sharing my expertise and sharing some of the things that I've learned. I like being able to share with [the pre-service teachers] and tell them what I've learned. I think my goal is to continue that. Sometimes it's hard, but it keeps me on my toes too. It keeps me from getting lazy and I have to make sure I know what I'm doing. Sharing with colleagues and other adults is important for me. I think I have come a long way with that. ... When I worked with the pre-service teachers, I realized that I should share what I do.

This particular veteran teacher realized that there was mutual benefit in mentoring a student teacher. It pushed her teaching practice forward and kept her “from getting lazy.” She articulated that the pre-service teachers learned from her teaching experiences and her mistakes, which made a difference in their professional development.

Another veteran teacher shared her experience with mentoring:

*Having pre-service teachers has been really positive and the fact that one of my pre-service teachers is now working at our school is great. I understand how hard it is and you're trying to take your classes, do student teaching, and feelings of being overwhelmed when kids don't understand—what do you do? So helping the pre-service teachers understand how to assess their students, and what to do next and how to move on is great. It's been rewarding.*

This teacher’s mentorship of her student teacher made a difference for the school and the student teacher. She mentored the student teacher well, and felt success and validation when the student teacher was hired. It gave her a sense of purpose and accomplishment, as she made a difference that benefited the student teacher, her school, as well as gave her a sense of satisfaction.

One teacher mentor was an early career teacher of five years, and had just recently mentored a student teacher for the first time. She described her nervousness and thoughts that she was not experienced enough to mentor someone. However, she found the experience rewarding and realized that she could influence and make a difference for future teachers.

*Being a mentor was a huge opportunity. It was very humbling. I didn't think I could take on a role like that, but it was awesome to see another teacher feel confident and help her to be successful. Also, I felt more confident as well. Mentoring helped me learn a lot more about myself – that I was always nervous to share because I wasn't confident in my student teaching, but I realized that it's not about me but just trying to help and share*
with this teacher. This reminded me that as teachers we're always learning and being life-long learners.

This teacher emphasized the benefit of her increased confidence that she also received from mentoring someone.

The teachers who had mentored pre-service teachers felt success in their experiences and that they made a difference for the pre-service teachers, their school, as well as themselves. These positive experiences supported the teachers desire to remain at their schools, where they could make a difference for pre-service teachers.

The secondary teacher participants did not mention mentoring during their interviews, and did not indicate if they had mentored pre-service teachers during their employment.

**Acknowledgement.**

The theme of acknowledgement emerged from the individual teacher interviews. All ten participants mentioned being positively “acknowledged,” “accepted,” “appreciated,” or “thanked” for their work. They either stated or implied that the acknowledgement they received from students, families, colleagues, administrators, or other professionals, brought them enjoyment and feelings of success, and was a concrete way that they knew that they had made a difference.

*By students and families.*

All teachers shared that the most and greatest acknowledgement they received was from their students, and these were defining moments for them as teachers. The acknowledges illustrated the effect and influence they had on their students, which in turn were reasons for them to continue to teach at their schools. Some teachers were explicit in identifying that the verbal or non-verbal acknowledgement, and gifts they received, illustrated that they made a difference for their students and families. Some teachers, however, mentioned these acknowledgements in their interviews or in sharing about their artifacts, but did not explicitly connect the acknowledgement to examples of making a difference themselves. However, the connection and implication was clear that the appreciation and acknowledgement of the teachers’ work was demonstrated in different ways.

All six elementary teachers said that families would often show their appreciation verbally to them. One of them described an example,
Parents come in and say "thank you for helping them learn to read, because in [grade] they weren't able to read them and they used to behave in [a particular] way and now it's so different. Thank you for working with them.

This teacher said that it was moments of appreciation like those that gave her fulfillment in knowing that she had a positive impact on her students.

One teacher shared her artifact of a fan, covered with her former class’ photos. It was made and given to her by a grandmother of one of her former students. She treasured the fan, as it symbolized the teamwork and relationships with her students, as well as the appreciation shown by her student’s grandmother.

On the other hand, the secondary teachers had little contact with their students’ families, so acknowledgement from secondary parents was minimal. However, the secondary teachers did say that the “families have their hardships too, but they appreciate us” and that the families were “appreciative of the growth of their children.”

The foremost acknowledgement and appreciation teachers received were from their students. This was shown in different ways by both secondary and elementary students. One secondary teacher shared this touching story about her artifact, a Christmas card,

I got a Christmas card from a student. There was a dollar in the card. This girl didn't have electricity in her house, but she found a dollar to give to me for Christmas. That's how the kids are here. They will give you a bite of their sandwich, the shirt off their back. They will find a way to give and that was touching to me. I was stunned at the gift. ... I would have been touched with the card, but when I saw the dollar in it, it really hit me. I knew of the struggles at their house, so I know what that dollar means for that family. It symbolizes that even when I don't realize it, I'm making a difference. Even when I'm not thinking about it, it's just my job, but I am appreciated.

This story was an unforgettable moment for this teacher. The card symbolized the degree to which the teacher had made a difference in this student’s life, and that she was acknowledged with this precious gift. This moment, that proved the difference she made, was one that motivated this secondary teacher to remain at her school.

An elementary teacher shared her artifacts of drawings, letters, and flowers given to her by her students. She said she received a plumeria flower, a letter, or a drawing every day from at least one of her students. They were physical reminders of her relationship to her students and
the caring and appreciation that they had for her. One of her student’s notes read “I am glad [glad] you are my teacher [teacher]” in neon pink marker, with a drawing of the student and the teacher together with huge smiles on their faces. During her interview, the teacher smiled widely as she shared this artifact.

Another secondary teacher told his story of acceptance by his students, which symbolized his relationship with them and the difference he had made.

*I will never forget the first [program] I ever did. After, I was cleaning up, they hounded me "[Teacher], please come back to the room." It was traditional for them to have a potluck after [program]. When I got there, they were all waiting for me. They hadn't eaten because they waited for me, their teacher, and it was important for them to wait for me before they said grace. I will never forget that. I felt accepted from the beginning.*

The teacher said that it was moments like these that made him want to stay at the school. He was welcomed and accepted by his students, and recognized and appreciated for his efforts as a teacher.

As shared in an earlier section on student relationships, all teachers felt acknowledged and appreciated when their former students returned to their classrooms to say “hello” and visit them. “When I see my former students and tell me they appreciated what they learned from me. That makes me feel really happy.”

**By peers and other professionals.**

Teachers also received acknowledgement by their colleagues and other professionals. The acknowledgement, which came as positive feedback about their work was welcomed by the teachers and encouraged them to continue their work and remain in their schools. The feedback received from colleagues and professionals validated their work and the difference they were making in their teaching.

One secondary teacher said that a professional who was not on staff at her school, but supported her work in her classroom, was “always giving [me] feedback and pats on the back. It was good because it kept [me] going and I felt good and it helped me a lot.”

Another secondary teacher said that other than his students, the acknowledgment from his peers was what kept him motivated in his job and at his school, “the support and acknowledgement received from my peers is what keeps me going.”
The elementary teachers all mentioned their structured weekly meetings, where there was designated time to share their successes and receive feedback from their peers. They all said that this time was valuable and it was “nice to be recognized for our work.” One teacher said that without this specific time, she sometimes did not see what she was doing well and it helped to keep her motivated in her work at her school. Another elementary teacher shared that when she talked with her colleague about her challenges in her classroom, her colleague pointed out the successes she also had, which validated her and the acknowledgement she received from those discussions motivated her as well.

Four of the six elementary teachers also identified an educator consultant that visited their school as another person who acknowledged their work and also helped them to improve their practice. The consultant visited the school multiple times during the school year and observed the teachers in their classrooms. The consultant gave the teachers feedback after their observations and the teachers appreciated the constructive criticism, as well as being recognized for those things they had done well. They felt that this feedback was important in keeping them motivated, as well as to help them improve their pedagogy.

*By administrators.*

Teachers mentioned that they received very little acknowledgement from their administrators. However, the few that did were forthright that the acknowledgement and validation by their administrators was motivating, helpful and encouraging. One teacher said this about being acknowledged, “Everyone gets [acknowledgement] from their students, but from an administrator? That would be very helpful.” Another teacher said that she has “always been supported and praised for my efforts [by administration].” She shared that this contributed to her sense of efficacy, validated her work, and encouraged her to remain at her school, as she knew administration was supportive of her. One veteran teacher said “acknowledgement helps, especially for the newer teachers. They need to know what they’re doing right.” He felt that if teachers were given constructive, as well as positive feedback, it could help retain teachers in his school.

A secondary teacher shared this powerful statement about the importance of acknowledgment by administrators,

*There also needs to be respect, teachers need to feel valued and honored– teachers need pats on the back, to be celebrated–this would make people feel like they are noticed for*
what they're doing, even if it's not a big thing, but just to feel like they're respected and appreciated.

In his interview, this teacher shared his thoughts that if teachers were acknowledged by their administrators for their great work, and given pats on the back, it would help morale and keep them motivated at their schools.

**Feeling unacknowledged.**

Acknowledgement, particularly by veteran teachers, seemed to be a retention issue. Three of the veteran teachers shared their discontent with the level of acknowledgement by their administrators and the DOE. The emphasis on this topic indicated their level of unhappiness with how veteran teachers are appreciated within the school and government system.

Veteran teachers discussed and commented about the ways in which they were acknowledged by the Hawai'i DOE. The general feeling by the veteran teachers who had been teaching for more than 15 years was of disdain. “For teaching 20 years, I got a 20-year pin, Really? That didn’t do anything for me. I don’t know what would do it, but something more than a pin, or nothing at all.” One veteran elementary teacher said, “I got my [20 year] pin two years late. The pin didn’t matter to me. That wasn’t really a reward.” The tardiness of the gift sent a message that her years of service seemed to not really matter, as no effort was put into getting it to her in a timely manner. For 30 years of service, the Hawai'i DOE gave teachers a plaque, and currently they give a pen and a certificate. One teacher questioned, “Is that how much [teachers] are valued? Some teachers are getting their certificates four years late!” And another sentiment was of not being valued at all by the DOE. “[Teacher] retired with 31 years of service and they gave her a plaque and I just thought that they don’t value us.” The elementary and secondary veteran teachers felt little, if at all, acknowledgement by the DOE.

One of these teacher said, “I don't feel like I'm valued for the amount of time I put in to the profession. My husband will say to me ‘You're so smart. You should do something else. People don't appreciate you.’” A veteran teacher with more than 20 years gave this description, “I feel like a drop in the bucket. I'm a drop in a pool of big water. I feel invisible.” Examples such as these were prevalent in the veteran teacher interviews and within the focus groups.

The teachers who had been teaching for less than 10 years did not mention negative feelings about this. The elementary and secondary early career teachers did not place much
emphasis on appreciation and acknowledgement from the DOE or their administrators. One early career teacher said,

You won’t get follow up or a thank you [from administrators], or asking what supports you need. You won’t get it unless you physically go there and ask for it. So it’s basically taking care of yourself. … acknowledgment is transient and could be helpful….but I don’t wait for it.

One early career teacher explained his experience,

You don’t wait for acknowledgement. If you wait for it, you’ll wait forever. Personally, acknowledgement from administration would be great, but it wouldn’t mean as much to me as when a child, a student, or my peers acknowledges me and what I’m doing. If we wait for that, you’ll wait forever and nothing will get done.

When asked about acknowledgement by her administrator or the DOE, an early career elementary teacher said, “….that doesn’t matter to me. It’s the kids that do.”

Making a difference was a factor that influenced the teachers’ decisions to remain teaching in their schools. They felt they made a difference in a number of ways and were acknowledged and appreciated for this by parents, students, and sometimes by administrators. The teachers also felt unappreciated by their employer, the DOE, as well as their administrators. One teacher shared,

If it came to a point where I felt like I wasn't making a difference, then I would leave, but I know that what I do makes a difference and that the relationships I have with students and families are important.

Perspective and Community Understanding

Contrary to popular belief, most of the parents do care.

-Veteran Teacher

One factor that emerged but was not explicitly identified by the teacher participants as influencing the teachers’ decisions to remain in their Title I schools was their perspective on the students, families, and community. However, upon coding the data it was clear that the teachers’ perspectives influenced their work with their students and families, and either helped or challenged their interactions and work with their students. This in turn, encouraged or discouraged them to remain teaching in their schools.
As stated earlier, typically communities with high needs Title I schools with a majority of the students in poverty, have many challenges. Some of these challenges include low graduation, low employment, and high crime rates.

Nine of the ten teacher participants in this study sympathetically understood the challenges of the community, families, and their students in which they worked. These understandings influenced their interactions with their students. Because of their view of the community and students, the teachers did not feel that they were in conflict with the families or community, but were helping the students to be successful given whatever situation they were in at home. One teacher shared this understanding of the parents in her community:

_The parents here will usually do as much as they can for their child and go above and beyond. I think their families love them and try hard for them. But what we see from the outside, they aren't doing enough. Some people will say "The parents aren't involved" but I bet you if you ask them, they'll say they are involved. Some of them work two jobs and they feel like they've bought their school supplies and that's what they can do. Some teachers want them to sit and do homework but sometimes it's not an option. Some ... buy their child's school supplies and that's how they're involved, but you want them to do homework with them and read with them, but they can't because they're working two jobs and the other parent is working a different shift. ... I have close relationships with parents which I appreciate. So even when parents tell me that they'll work on homework with their child, and they don't, sometimes it's because guess what? Mom has to catch the bus at 4am to get to work._

This perspective helped the teacher to understand her students and to be flexible in her work with them. Because of her relationships with families and her understanding of what they experienced at home, it helped her to be more understanding of her students and their situations. Similarly, another teacher shared this,

_[The students] come from a huge range of backgrounds. A lot of them try their best with what they have. Whether it's working a lot of hours, and not being able to be home with them, they try to keep up with their homework and being at school every day. I think we have different ideas of what our expectations are. As parents, they may think that as long as I get them to school on time every day, they have their homework, that's good. But as teachers, we hope that they'll do their homework with them or sit and read with them._
This teacher recognized that there is disconnect between what teachers’ expectations were and what parents thought was enough support. However, the teacher understood this because he knew some of the challenges that the families faced. Another teacher discussed the challenges that some of his students’ families faced and articulated understanding of the effect that had on the support they provided.

*There are a lot of supportive parents. Sometimes too supportive–lickin’s; or they are only there when they’re failing, or they say they'll do something but they don't follow through; or both parents are incarcerated. There's a higher density of families here that have challenges. But overall, there are a lot of great parents and they help out the community a lot, but sometimes if there are challenges, they are extreme. It’s difficult for them to be supportive in the ways schools or teachers would like.*

Another teacher shared,

*Life is unfair for [the students]. They lack access. Socioeconomically, they are disadvantaged. We have a range of kids--some are fine and are taken care of in every way, but others have had a bad string of events–drugs, death, transience, sickness, and all that combined leads to a different caliber of student. Emotionally, some are fine, but there seem to be more students with higher emotional needs in our schools. And no one wants to address it.*

This particular teacher mentioned quite often during his interview that he felt that life was unfair to his students and that they did not have access to the same opportunities as other children in other communities. This bothered him and felt that his work at his school was a means to help his students to become successful, given their challenges and situations.

A secondary teacher shared this example of understanding her students and their personal situations and how it affected her decisions in her classroom:

*When students come late,... I’ll ask the kids why they’re late...if their parent woke up late and couldn’t get them here on time, I won’t send them to the office because it’s not their fault. You need to weigh the consequences. Like in retail, if someone returns something, and it’s worn, you need to decide if you want to take it back or not. If you don’t, you may lose that customer forever. And we’re talking about hundreds of dollars coming into your store and our kids are our business. We need to make decisions like that.*
The teacher was aware of the effect that her decisions about students had on them. She wanted to ensure that her students were fairly treated, as well as wanted to come to school. If she sent them unfairly to the office for being late, or treated them in other, unfair ways, she was afraid they would not attend school at all. These perspectives helped the teachers in their work in their schools. It helped them to see the positives in their students’ situations and encouraged them to continue in their work.

Teachers also mentioned the support they received from their students’ families and the support of the community.

I think they're supportive. I think a lot of them are tough love. But parents run the spectrum- some are very supportive and will do what they can. And others are not around, for a variety of reasons - because of their own experiences in school or because they don't have time. Some are just scared to come to the school and talk to the teacher.

Individual teacher responses about their perspective on families included, “Lots of good, supportive, families. Appreciative of the growth and that the school helps with the growth of their children. Also, they're very helpful and will help during the ho‘olaulea (celebration), academic celebrations, field trips,” “It's very family oriented.” “It's awesome. It's very loving and supportive,” “The community is tight. I am a part of the community. … It's a reciprocal relationship–I've taught these kids and they have welcomed me from day one. They know I'm here to support them.”

Another teacher shared, “It's a rough and tough town, but there's a lot of aloha when you're accepted. I feel more accepted than ever because of my years here.” Another teacher described her experience with her students’ families

They're really about family. When you come to this school, they'll bring you into their family. They're willing to share about their home lives and the more I know about their home life, the better I can help them at school.

The following teacher’s description of the families in the community was instrumental in her work with her students. This perspective allowed her to be more flexible and positive in her interactions and work.

I think many of them have big, loving families. Their families have it hard because a lot of them can't focus on their kids' education because their focused on making the ends meet, keeping lights on or food in the house, or keeping someone employed. So I know
they want the best for their kids, but they can't focus on education because they're so consumed with living day-to-day and surviving.

These teachers who understood the community, family, and student struggles and looked at them with an understanding and positive lens, seemed to have a more positive experience in their schools, which affected their desire to continue to teach there. The examples mentioned above illustrate the perspective these teachers had about their students, their personal lives, and the community they lived in. The teachers understood their students’ situations, often citing the positives in what they observed of the families and their struggles. This perspective helped these teachers to work more flexibly with their students, and gave them a sense of purpose in supporting their students and their families. This perspective was as a positive factor in retaining the teachers at their schools.

On the other hand, one early career teacher had a comparably negative perspective about the community and families at her school. She felt that the challenges of the community were overwhelming for her personally. It influenced her understanding of the students and her work with them. It also had an effect on her personally and resulted in additional personal stress.

*The kids are resilient and are not bothered by some of the things that bother me. Like "my parents fought at open house" and [the message] went over their heads, but it hurts me and I don't forget about it. There's a lot of emotional need from the students that may not be at another school. But it also makes me sad because I can make more of a difference at this school and maybe I can provide the nurturing that they need and that they're not getting from home, but I'm not saying that's true for all students, but there are a few kids in each grade that have struggles and challenges that I didn't have when I was growing up. But to have kids feel safe and nurtured and loved at school, that's what I love. If I go to another school, the kids there may not need me for that because they have their parents for that. That's what I want for them, but I guess I feel like I can make more of a difference for the kids in this community than in a school where the kids would pass the HSA whether I was their teacher or not. It's been stressful.*

The teacher had difficulty in relating to her students’ and families’ lives. As a teacher, she had strong convictions about her role and goals, but there was tension between that and the population she worked with. She felt unable to work successfully given some of her students’ emotional and academic needs without feeling strained. She elaborated,
I think that many of them don't value education the same way that I do. But I feel like I'm being stereotypical because there are a lot of parents who do value education and work with their children at home and have them try hard in school, and they enjoy learning. School's not the most important thing in life for the families. Sports are important, just family time is really important and sometime that's valued more than school. I have had parents pick their kids up early to take them to sports practice and that shows the child that school isn't a priority and I wish it were. I think it has a lot of challenges that kind of are a cycle. I think there's a lot of children born early - young pregnancies, it's a violent community - football and hunting and chicken fighting, UFC. Those are things very big in this community. A lot of times the kids try to solve their problems by fighting and I don't think it solves anything. I know meth is a big problem in this community. Poverty and all the challenges that go with it are too. I don't really engage in community activities.

The teacher felt disconnected to what she felt the families valued, and the socioeconomic status of her students. Because she felt disconnected to her students and families not only in what she felt they placed value on, but in her status as a teacher, as a “role of authority” and that she felt she did not physically fit into the community. However, she did expand on her more positive interactions with her students and their families and her perceptions of them.

The students and parents have accepted me, and they don't act differently around me. They're genuine. I try to get to know people and to know what it's like to be a part of this community.... I think my perception of the community has improved over time. Before I got there I had heard so many people make negative comments or express concern for me going out there to student teach that I was convinced it was going to be little scary. ... But I actually felt very welcomed when I first got here, and interacting with the kids was naturally effortless. I think I have a deeper respect and understanding for the community now.

The teacher admitted to having a more negative perspective about the community prior to working there, but that she had positive experiences once arrived. These positive experiences affected her perspective on the community. Although she still had challenges in understanding the community, she felt welcomed. These understandings and perspectives on her students and school community affected her work with her students, resulted in a high level of stress, and influenced her job satisfaction. She had difficulty relating to the students’ home lives and what
she thought the families prioritized and valued. Revealed during the interview was the teacher’s hope to eventually transfer to a school closer to her home and to a school where the academic and socioeconomic status of the community was higher than the community in which she worked. The geographic location, resulting in a longer commute to and from work, was the biggest factor explicitly identified in this teacher’s desire to move to another school. However, from the interview data, it seemed that the perspective on the community and students were also factors in her desire to transfer.

A teacher who had a shift in perspectives about his students early on in his career shared his perspective about his students, “People think the kids from [community] can't go anywhere, and as far as numbers go, we may have more challenges than other communities, but what matters is the students and what we can do with them.” This teacher admitted that initially, he had a different perspective on the community and his students. “My perception of the students changed over time because of my connections to them and the relationships I have. I got to know who the kids are, what they're about.” This shift in perspective was important to this teacher, as it helped him to be more understanding and see the positives in his students and his work. Without this change in perspective, it would have been more difficult for him to continue his work there. The challenges of the community and the negativity in his perspective would have made it difficult for him to continue and see the successes and positives in his work. This perspective helped him to remain at his school—he had been teaching at the school for over 20 years at the time of this study. Similarly, the early career teacher, with the comparatively negative view of the community, might have been going through a slow change in perspective at the time of her interview but still felt that she eventually wanted to transfer.

The perspectives of teachers on the students, families, and community of their schools seemed to influence their feelings about their students, work, and job satisfaction. Of the 10 teacher participants, the nine who had more positive views seemed to have increased satisfaction with their work and more clearly intended to remain at their schools. The early career teacher that was hoping to eventually transfer to another school had more negative views on the community and did not articulate the same understandings of the families’ or students’ personal lives as the other teachers.
Students

Don't get distracted by all the adults.
Just remember why you're doing this. You're doing it for the kids.
... don't forget why you chose to teach.

– Early Career Teacher

Without students, a teacher is not a teacher. The primary reason all ten teachers shared that they remained teachers in their schools was because of their students—students were the foremost factor identified throughout all interviews, focus group interviews, and artifact sharing. A number of sub-themes emerged related to students as factors that kept teachers teaching in their schools: previous interaction and relationships with students, joy in the positive relationships between teachers and students, and the challenges that arose from negative relationships between teachers and students.

**Previous connections to community or students.**

Of the ten teachers, seven of them, four elementary and three secondary, had previous interactions and relationships with students at their schools, or a connection to the community before they began teaching at their schools. The relationships to the students and connection to the community were factors in five teachers’ decisions to pursue a position at their schools and remain there.

Two teachers had connections to their schools upon being hired, but they were not factors in the teachers’ decisions to accept their positions there or to remain there. One teacher had a relative that taught at the school prior to her hiring, but she said that it did not affect her decision to teach there. Whether her relative was on staff did not factor into her decision to accept a teaching position. Another teacher’s parents grew up in the community in which she worked. However, she said that this was not a factor in her decision to teach at the school.

On the contrary, the other five teachers’ decisions to seek positions at their schools or the desire to teach in their schools were influenced positively by their previous experiences with students from the community or connections to the community.

A secondary teacher had a connection to the school community and an elementary teacher had a connection to the culture of the community, which were factors that drew each of them to teach at their schools. The elementary teacher had a cultural connection to the community of the school and felt that her ethnicity, which was the same as the majority of the
student population, was a reason she felt comfortable teaching there. Another teacher grew up in
the community, had moved away, and then chose to return to teach when she received a call for
an interview from the principal. She felt that this was her way of giving back to the community
in which she grew up.

*I grew up out here, so when [the principal] called, it felt cosmic—like this is where I'm
supposed to be. I feel like this is my way of giving back. I've come full circle. I was
getting calls in January from different schools, but I chose to come back. I'm here on
purpose.*

Three teachers, of both secondary and elementary backgrounds, had previous
relationships with students at their schools before seeking positions there. These previously
formed relationships were factors in their decisions to teach and seek out their schools for
employment. Given the challenges of high needs Title I schools, seeking out employment in
these settings is not common.

One of the teachers who sought employment at her school had field experiences in her
university teacher education program at a school within the community, and also at the school
that she was currently employed. She had positive experiences in her classroom field placements
in her teacher education program so she was willing and excited to work at her school. She said
that she felt knowing the school and community before accepting a position there had been
helpful, as she already was familiar with the school, the students, and school expectations and
procedures.

Another secondary teacher worked in an outside, non-profit educational program for two
years with students who attended the school he would later accept a position at.

*I worked with [community] students. I think a lot of [those] kids broke a lot of
stereotypes for me. They were great kids—smart kids, top-notch students and that broke
the mold for what I thought was in [the community].*

This teacher, throughout his interviews, emphasized how he chose to teach where he
was because he enjoyed the students in his previous work with them and had seen their potential.
Because of his experience working with the students in the community prior to teaching there, he
already appreciated the students and what they were capable of. This message was consistent
when he shared his artifact—dirt—as a symbol of nurturing and cultivating the potential of students.
Lots of times, students come to me and say that [community] is dirt…. There's no green. But I tell them that where there's dirt, there's potential. Something can grow. And symbolically, sometimes our students are held back by stereotypes but they have potential and that is true for those that don't do well in school. You have to get the kids the right nutrients—nurturing, parenting, for them to get on the right track and be successful. I show the kids that we water the grass for a couple of weeks and the grass will grow.

This teacher was motivated to seek a position at his school because of the students and wanted to remain there because of them, and as his experience at his school lengthened, he knew he wanted to stay because of them.

Another veteran teacher’s previous experience working with families at her church in the community was her motivation in her choice to teach at her school. She transferred to her school by choice after teaching at a school, which was closer to her home.

One of the main reasons [I chose to teach here] is because I go to church here and I wanted to work with the kids in this area. I prayed about it and knew I had the heart for this community... after seven years at [another school] I felt like a change. I worked with the kids in this community in the summer, so I knew the kids.

Her experience working with the families and the children in the community, motivated her to seek employment at the Title I school in the neighborhood. She recognized the school’s need for her there, as well as her own enjoyment working with the children at her church. Once there, she said she knew that she was “placed [there] for a reason” and would not leave until she felt her “time was up.”

Connections to the community, and previously formed relationships built with families and students in the community were factors in teachers’ decisions to teach in their high needs Title I schools, and reasons to remain.

**Positive relationships with students.**

The relationships that the ten teacher participants had with their students were the primary reason for their desire to remain teaching at their schools. Whether the teacher participant was an elementary or secondary teacher, all participants mentioned the importance of their relationships with their students. This was a clear message consistent throughout the interviews, focus group interviews, and discussion of artifacts. “Don't get distracted by all the adults. Just remember why you're doing this. You're doing it for the kids. They will try to distract
you, but don't forget why you chose to teach.” The quote at the beginning of this section identified the goal of working with students and influencing them was the reason they were all there, and it was helpful to remember that when challenges arose that distracted them from this objective.

Both early career and veteran teachers found satisfaction and fulfillment in their relationships with their students. Inherently, teachers are characterized as wanting to interact and influence other humans, particularly school-aged children—interaction focused on positive affectation is the nature of teaching. Thus, this is not an unexpected finding. One teacher clearly stated, “People ask why I'm still here—it’s all about my relationships with the students.”

A veteran teacher shared this experience, “Over the years, I notice a lot of kids calling me aunty or mom. It's probably because of how I talk to them. They get embarrassed, but I tell them it's ok because that means they feel comfortable with me. I sometimes come off as a parent to them, but I don't mind because it's a sign of respect.” This example, which was similarly mentioned by other veteran and early career teachers, the students felt so comfortable with them that they were looked at and referenced as a family member. This illustrates the comfort level of the students, the positive relationships, and the feeling of family created within the classrooms.

**Visits.**

Both elementary and secondary teachers shared their happiness and feelings that they had made a difference when former students would stop by to say “hello”, whether they were still a student at the school, or they had already graduated. All teachers shared examples such as this: “I enjoy my relationship with the kids. I like watching them come back to visit me and share their successes with me. Even when you're not their teacher, they still want to come back. One secondary teacher shared a particularly touching story:

> *I had a Special Education student. He was very bright and always down on himself. Last year, he came on the day that they did their HSA testing. ...he came sprinting in and practically picked me up off the ground and was hugging me so tight. I thought something was really wrong but he said "I got a 304 on my HSA and I had to tell you and share it with you. It's the first time in my life I got a 300 on my HSA!" I was tearing up and said "And you came all the way over here to tell me that?" And he said, "I had to. You're my teacher!" I hadn't taught him for over two years, so that was a huge moment for me.*
The student’s act of returning to share his success with his teacher two years after she had him in her class was a defining moment for this teacher. At that moment, she knew that she had developed a positive relationship with this student and was significant enough to him that he wanted to share his success with her. Another veteran teacher mentioned that he

...really, really love[s] when a former student comes by and says ‘hi’ and remembers something about my class. I feel like that’s a success because in my early career, I wasn't the best teacher, but at least I knew I made a positive impression on my kids, or was a role model.

Another early career teacher said that he found success and enjoyment “when kids are doing well, leave, and then come back and share their accomplishments with me.” These examples of visits by students were acts that reminded the teachers of the influence on and positive relationships they had with their students.

The teacher participants in this study chose to be at their schools or planned to continue their careers there. An early career teacher shared that because of his relationships with his students, it would be hard to leave. “Students are very warm and big-hearted and they love you instantly. It's hard to break their hearts. If I ever think about leaving the school, I think about my kids and see their faces and I can't do it.” The visits by students to their former teachers were important reminders for the teachers of the positive impact and affect they had on their students. It validated their relationships and the influence the teachers had on individual students.

**Negative relationships between students and teachers.**

Emerging from the discussion about positive teacher-student relationships as factors that influence teacher retention was the topic of negative teacher-student relationships. The topics of Teach for America (TFA) teachers and negative relationships between students and teachers emerged as a factor that negatively affected teacher retention.

**Teach For America.**

The unexpected topic of TFA teachers emerged from the interviews. Eight of the ten teachers mentioned TFA as one of the reasons for higher rates of teacher attrition at their schools. Because Hawai‘i generally does not have enough applicants to fill the state’s teacher employment needs, the DOE relies on emergency hires, or non-highly qualified teachers, mainland recruiting, and programs such as TFA to fill vacant teaching positions. The emphasis on this issue emerged mainly from the four secondary teachers. The elementary teachers did not
identify a tension in relationships between the TFA teacher and elementary school students, but did acknowledge that the hiring of TFA teachers contributed to attrition in their school.

A non-profit organization, TFA’s mission is “to enlist, develop, and mobilize our nation’s most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity” (www.teachforamerica.org/about-us/our-mission). Its objectives are to recruit individuals from a variety of backgrounds to teach in high needs low-income communities. Depending on the TFA recruit’s physical location, they are trained anywhere from seven to ten weeks during the summer, and then placed in low-income schools in full-time teaching positions. Throughout the school year, they have professional development sessions and meetings with individual TFA support members. The teachers are contracted and salaried by their schools for two years. In return for each year of service, TFA teachers are eligible for an education award of $5730.00, as well as loan forbearance, with any loan interest paid by TFA after each year of service (www.teachforamerica.org/about-us/our-mission). Currently, TFA places teachers in high needs schools all over the nation, and places teachers in the schools where this study took place.

All teacher participants except one indicated that they thought their schools had a low rate of retention, or high rate of attrition. One teacher was “not sure.” When teachers were asked why they thought teacher retention was low, eight of them mentioned TFA as one of the reasons. Given the maturity of intermediate and high school students, the teachers indicated that those students were more likely to understand the “revolving door,” as one teacher described it, of TFA, or mainland teachers at their schools. Upon further discussion about TFA teachers, and the effect on teacher retention, all eight teachers mentioned the short, two year contract of the TFA teachers. They felt that this short contract was detrimental to their schools, as well as to their students. The short contract encouraged instability for the school in terms of curriculum progress and fidelity, as well as instability for students and teachers.

In addition to the belief that the TFA contract length contributed to the higher rates of teacher attrition at the schools, four of the eight teachers identified the disconnect between the TFA teachers and their students as another factor influencing teacher retention. All four teachers that mentioned this were secondary teachers. During the focus group, the elementary teachers noted that the younger students were not aware of TFA and that the secondary students would be more adept and attuned to the personnel situations of teachers at their schools. The four secondary teachers shared their similar observations that the students that knew their teachers
were TFA “don’t want to get close to [them].” Since TFA teachers’ contracts are for two years, students know and anticipate that those teachers will not stay at the school for the long term. One teacher described TFA teachers as “teacher mercenaries who make things worse by leaving after a couple of years.”

Teachers shared the following sentiments and observations of the relationships that students have with TFA teachers: “… it's heartbreaking to the kids”, “it's an issue for the kids because they often have a revolving door of people in their lives so when their teachers leave, it bothers them,” “[TFA] is a good concept, to recruit teachers, but it doesn't help when kids don't want to build relationships with teachers because they know the teacher will leave. …they won’t get close to them.” One early career teacher shared this thought about teacher retention and personnel stability,

The students probably feel good to know that they have the same teacher that my sibling had and that they know the teacher likes teaching there because they’ve been there so long. I'm sure that affects the students because of their feelings of stability and the relationships with teachers. It's a big thing for students to feel safe and if there are new teachers every year, they need to get to know them and they wouldn't have that stability.

Another teacher shared that “[TFA teachers] can't build relationships with the kids or the staff here.” The presence of TFA teachers in the secondary schools was a concern shared by the teachers.

Mainland recruits and new teachers.

Not only was TFA mentioned as a teacher group that had difficulties developing relationships with students, but mainland teacher recruits were also identified. This observation was shared by all 4 secondary teachers. The Hawai‘i DOE annually recruits teachers from the mainland USA. According to the secondary teachers, as well as one elementary teacher, this was a problem.

One early career secondary teacher said that he had heard first hand high school students tell new, mainland recruit teachers “‘You’re haole (Caucasian) so you’re probably going to leave us next year. … It kills the students because they latch on [to the teachers] and then they leave. Not only does it affect the students emotionally, but it’s hard when there’s a new teacher and they don’t know the school, the kids, and the quality of the teaching goes down.”
In an extreme example, a veteran secondary teacher shared a story about a colleague at her school who was not a mainland recruit, but a new teacher. The students assumed that this teacher, being new, would not choose to remain at their school for the long term. When this teacher first started teaching, the students egged her car in the parking lot. She said that the students did not accept her right away, as they thought she would leave them, as many of the teachers did. When the students realized that she was not going to leave, they changed their attitude about the teacher and she formed a positive relationship with them. It was a terrible initial experience for the teacher, but one that reflected the students’ feelings of anger and frustration about teachers who did not stay at the school for a significant length of time. The students were on guard and upset before they even got to know her, as they assumed she would leave them. This example is extreme, but illustrates the effect of constant teacher attrition on these students.

Teachers mentioned the students’ assumption that these teachers would not be around long. The students in turn, did not make efforts to connect with or build relationships with these teachers, and in some cases, instigated negative incidents with the teachers. These negative relationships influenced the teachers in negative ways and affected their desire to remain in their schools. The challenges that teachers had in building positive relationships with students, as illustrated by the struggles that new teachers, mainland recruits, and TFA teachers had in building relationships with students, could have been factors in their desire to remain in their schools.

The relationships that the early career and veteran teachers had with their students were primary factors in keeping them in their schools and in teaching. One teacher shared, “At the end of the day, it's the connection with the kids that will keep me going.”

**Support and Relationships with Colleagues**

*Having the support [of two other teachers] was instrumental in helping me survive my first year and then in me deciding to stay.*

- Veteran Teacher

All ten of the participants were very clear that their relationships with their colleagues were strong factors in their desire to remain at their schools. They all felt that without these relationships of support and understanding, they would not have survived or have been successful at their schools.
Informal Support.

All ten teachers clearly stated that what helped them to get through their challenges at their schools and classrooms were their peers. Unanimously in their individual interviews, they shared that at least one, if not more, teachers at their schools had been their support system when they went through rough times. “Heavy support from my [team] teachers helped me a lot in my first year. [My team teachers] are the ones that keep me sane and help me through things.”

The informal, organically formed relationships with teachers at their schools were vital to the teachers’ success and factors that kept them there. One elementary teacher shared,

*My first year was really hard and I had a very difficult class as far as academic and behavioral needs. Having the support [of two other teachers] was instrumental in helping me survive my first year and then in me deciding to stay.*

The camaraderie and sense of support she received from her peers was critical to her survival and retention as teacher at her school. Another teacher described her experience:

*I was supported by my grade level. We would always have lunch together and anytime I didn't know something or had a concern, I'd talk to them and they would say "try this, try that" To have that mentorship and support is the greatest thing. Having direction is important.*

This teacher felt that her peer support group gave her much-needed direction and advice as she struggled through her early years as a teacher.

The ways teachers were supported by their colleagues were all very similar. Teachers acknowledged the support and relief they felt when they knew their peers were facing the same challenges they were. One teacher said that it was important to him to “find[ing] someone on the staff that I can talk to and vent to and it's not personal, and you can listen and talk and you feel like you're not alone.” Another said, “I would vent with them, talk to others to get their point of view on things and it helped me to understand the kids and the community.” This perspective on the students and the community was helpful to the teacher in understanding the population of the school and how to better work with the students and families. Without this, he acknowledged that his perceptions and ideas of the community would have been more negative than positive.

Teachers also felt supported with advice and just being able to share their struggles, even without problem-solving them. One veteran elementary teacher shared this about her and her grade level teaching partner,
...we talk about our kids...we get together once a week during lunch. And we talk about what we do with this kid or that kid. ... Sometimes when it gets really tough, I go next door and say "I need therapy!" and we don't come up with real solutions, but being able to talk and share stories is so helpful.

Another elementary teacher said that she and another teacher “eat lunch and vent, and just talk about how our days are going.” Similarly, another teacher said,

_I've always had someone I could go to. My coworkers would laugh, and say "That was your day? Listen to mine!" and they understand that we all have bad days and that there are days that go how we don't want them to go! They are sympathetic and help me to put things into perspective._

One secondary teacher admitted that she did not like to share openly with others about her challenges, however, she said that there was someone early in her career who she felt comfortable with and supported her through tough times.

_I usually kept to myself. But the other teachers that were there for a while were supportive in a lot of ways. ... Especially when you tell someone about your struggles with a certain student, they would share suggestions. I knew there were people there to help me if I needed it. When I first started teaching, I would talk with a counselor that was next door to me. It helped me a lot. She was a great sounding board. She was easy to talk to._

For teachers who did not want to involve others in their struggles, support was still found and appreciated.

For another early career teacher, the relationship and support from a teacher on her team morphed from a professional one to a personal friendship. She found great support from her friend. They were able to relate to each other on a personal and professional level.

_[I received] mentoring from a partner on my grade level. [Our] professional relationship turned into a friendship. I think just being able to share with one another our praises–things that are going on that are great in our classrooms, and then just being able to relate. When you're talking to someone that's not a teacher, it's different. Being able to relate at the level of knowing the students and the school. I can also just ask her about paperwork - since I'm new to being the GLC (grade level chairperson)._
As in the example above, teachers emphatically shared that they appreciated that their peers understood their struggles as teachers. Five of them mentioned that although they had support by personal friends or partners at home, it was different when their support had teaching experience similar to their own, and even better when the support worked at the same school. Said one secondary teacher, “Teachers understand teachers.”

**Formal Support.**

Another way teachers were supported at their schools was through formalized support by other teachers. This formalized support impacted the teachers’ desire to remain at their schools. This formalized support was identified by all teachers.

Included in their weekly schedule, the elementary teachers had a team meeting with peers that were working on the same curriculum. These formalized meetings, organized by the school, supported teachers and was a means for them to discuss what was occurring with their classrooms and their students.

_I do have a great group of people who I meet with weekly for 2 hours–my subject-level peers. In our meetings, we share our successes and our challenges. We make sure that we take the time to recognize what's going well in our classrooms and give genuine praise about our successes and we also are honest about what we are struggling with and with the walls down, we are open and can discuss what we need help with._

Appreciation of this formalized support was recognized in this way, “It's easy to get overwhelmed, but when we hear what's happening with other teachers, it helps everyone and I also feel like I'm not alone.” Another elementary teacher shared this about the formal support: _Strong relationships are very important. Not just for me as a teacher, but for the past three years I've had the [resource] teacher and [resource teacher] that help me tutor in the afternoon. We used to have [tutoring] and they helped me. I don't think it's just one teacher, but it takes the whole staff to do it. Some are not here for all students, but for the most part, most people are caring and want to help and it makes me want to stay._

She explained that the resource teachers at the school were involved with tutoring and support of the classroom teachers’ efforts in improving student academic levels. This support, formalized and structured for her with an afternoon tutoring time was appreciated and helped her feel that everyone worked toward the same goal. “These are our students—the more we help each other, the more we're helping all of our students.” These factors encouraged her to stay at her school, as
she recognized that the other resource teachers were collaborative and wanted to help. Another teacher also shared this,

_In our teacher meeting, I meet with another teacher and the special education teacher. It’s so helpful. We’ll ask each other questions and we bounce ideas and strategies off each other to see what we can do with students._

**Negative relationships between teachers.**

The theme of negative teacher-teacher relationships emerged in the focus groups and interviews. Teachers were vocal about how negative relationships between teachers affected the school and students, which affected teacher retention. Specifically, TFA was again mentioned as one factor in negative teacher-teacher relationships.

*Teach For America.*

As explained in the previous section on student relationships with teachers, TFA was identified as a negative factor on teacher retention at the secondary level. One teacher described the effect that TFA teachers have on their school,

_Programs like TFA require 2 or 3 years and a lot of [the teachers] don't fit here with our school and then they leave. And then we get a new group and then they leave. The kids are experiencing adult transience. They ask "Where's that teacher? Why did s/he leave? They were here for 2 years and now they're gone." Stability for the kids is the important thing as well as for the staff. It takes time and energy to get someone on board and knowing the school and curriculum. It takes a toll on the staff too._

The teachers in the secondary focus group shared their hesitancy in getting to know and support TFA teachers at their school. Knowing that TFA teachers will leave after two years, the veteran teachers in particular did not put much effort into supporting them. One early career secondary teacher described meeting a peer on his first day on the job,

_The very first day I met [teacher], she asked me if I was a TFA teacher and I said "no" and she gave me the biggest hug. I didn’t understand why until later. As a newer teacher, I don’t blame the old time teachers. I worked with a TFA teacher before and I mentored them and worked with them. I spent hours working on things with the teacher, because you want them to work with the kids, and want them to be a great teacher, and then they get up and leave. It’s so frustrating because you spend so much time and effort trying to_
support them and then they leave. It kills me—especially because they can be great teachers. I definitely don’t blame experienced teachers for feeling like that.

There was little effort invested in supporting TFA teachers at their school. The teachers recognized the transient nature of the organization and personnel, and did not warmly welcome the program or the teachers. The described negative relationships between TFA teachers and non-TFA teachers reflected the secondary teachers’ past experiences with TFA. This sentiment was common to all secondary teachers, where there seemed to be more challenges with TFA teachers at their schools than in the elementary school.

**Negative teacher relationships.**

Not only was TFA identified as a factor in teacher attrition in high needs Title I schools, other negative teacher-teacher relationships were also discussed by both elementary and secondary teachers. Elementary teachers identified negative teacher relationships as a factor that frustrated them and was a factor that contributed to them not wanting to remain at their schools.

One teacher described her experience with her peer,

*I am forced to work with a teacher that is extremely difficult to work with and our administration is not able to handle her. ... Administration is making it [teacher’s] job to talk to her and get her in line and take care of this person and it's making everyone miserable. ... What I can control is enjoyable but having to work with this one person is making my job difficult and less enjoyable. Everyone else is great to work with. It's a mess when we have to collaborate with her. The rest of the staff is cohesive.*

This teacher admitted that she had considered transferring to another school because of this situation. She felt that she and her colleagues were forced to work with this difficult teacher and were being unfairly asked to take care of personnel issues that were not their responsibility. One participant mentioned the effect on the school when teachers were unable to work together in the past, “I think there's been a clash of personalities in the past. People with the strong personalities clashed with others—the mix wasn't right.” This teacher explained that he thought the likelihood of teachers leaving the school was higher when teachers did not get along.

Having an understanding of others’ perspectives and personalities helped to improve these relationships. One elementary teacher said that the negative teacher relationships at her school were a challenge for her, but coming to common understandings was helpful.
Sometimes it's working with different personalities at school—understanding responsibilities, trying to make things as clear as possible, holding multiple meetings to make sure things are understood, and if not, how can we make things more manageable. How can we give and take? How can we make sure job descriptions are understood? Coming to common understandings making sure that everyone is looking at the students and moving the focus away from you and what you want with the understanding that one individual can't do everything, but everyone has to do their part.

The teacher had difficulties with a peer because their understandings about their objectives for students and their responsibilities were not aligned. She felt that the other teacher was difficult to work with and contributed to her dissatisfaction at work.

Another specific type of negative teacher-teacher relationship was between local resident teachers and mainland recruits. In similar sentiment with the teachers’ view about TFA teachers and their relationships with non-TFA teachers, the participants felt that the relationships between mainland recruited teachers and non-recruited teachers were a factor in teacher retention. The teachers in this study, elementary and secondary, thought that a mutually supportive relationship did not always exist between these two teacher groups. One elementary teacher suggested,

*If we can build the relationships between the mainland teachers and the local teachers and build their friendships, that's another goal right there. I think those that have stayed have become stronger leaders and make people want to stay.*

This teacher explained his observations that when the teachers, whether local or non-local, supported each other, it was a benefit for everyone involved—the teachers themselves, the students, and the school, as the support felt and given were factors that helped teachers stay at the school. He also shared his belief that “If you can be in the same school, in the same grade level, you will improve your practice and will become more efficient, confident and effective.” This happened when teachers supported each other, which encouraged their retention in their schools. He felt that he had always been supported and had gotten along well with his peers, which contributed to his desire to remain at his school. On the contrary, he also shared that he had often witnessed conflicts between personalities that led to teacher attrition.

*Secondary veteran and early career teacher relationships.*

An unexpected negative relationship between teachers was identified by the secondary educators during their focus group interview. When the discussion focused on the topic of
negative teacher relationships, the secondary teachers all agreed that there had been challenges in the relationships between veteran and early career teachers at their school. One early career teacher shared his interaction with a veteran teacher in his first year at his school,

*I had a teacher tell me straight up, “I'm not gonna know your name until you stay here for five years.” And that's because it's so transient. I love the guy, and he learned my name in the first two years (laughs), but it's a huge reflection on what the veteran teachers have gone through. They've seen so many young teachers come and go because there's no support and it jades everyone—it jades the new teachers coming in because there's a bunch of veteran teachers saying “Hey, I'm not going to get to know you, you're on your own, try your best, whatever, and if you're here in the next two years, then I'll talk to you and make a relationship with you. So that's hard on the young ones, and for the veteran teachers, it's hard. But at the same time, if the veteran teachers don't make the effort and don't try to get to know the new teachers, the new teachers feel they're stand-offish and then they don't have the support to stay.*

This perspective was confirmed by another veteran teacher during the focus group. She shared that she had past conversations with that particular veteran teacher. She said she asked him,

*“Only now you’re doing that? I’ve been doing this for a long time!” (laughs) I admit I stopped wanting to know [the new teachers]. I stopped doing it a long time ago because I told myself that my time is valuable. It’s either going to be spent on what I need to do for my class or my kids. And for me to spend time with a person who might leave, I need to prioritize my time and use it better.*

The veteran teachers at the school witnessed the transience of the teaching staff and were negatively affected by it. The teachers that were around a long time chose not to place effort into relationships with new teachers because of their past experiences. Having placed their time, effort and resources into a person who left the school after a short time seemed a waste to them. This, however, may have had an effect on the retention of the new teachers, as suggested above by the early career secondary teacher in his statement that, “if the veteran teachers don’t make the effort and don’t try to get to know the new teachers, the new teachers feel they’re stand-offish and then they don’t have the support to stay.”

Another comment made about not building relationships with new teachers was partly due to “see[ing] administrators valuing these new teachers more than the old timers at the school.”
The veteran teachers felt unacknowledged and underappreciated as compared to the early career teachers. This also created a division between the two groups of teachers.

**Administration**

*If you have empathy with administration, and them with you, it’s easier to stay.*

-Veteran Teacher

**Relationships.**

In interviews with both veteran and early career teachers, the topic of relationships with administration emerged as a factor that influenced the participants’ satisfaction at work. It was evident that the type of relationship that the teachers had with their administrators impacted their perspective of the support they felt they received from them, as well as the understanding they had about decisions made by their administrators. Administrators were identified as principals and assistant principals.

Teachers shared that it was easier to understand, sympathize, and agree to disagree with their administrators when they had what they termed a “good relationship” with them. A “good relationship” was identified as one of mutual understanding, respect, and support.

*If you have a good relationship with administration, it’s easier for you to go along with decisions that you might not usually agree with... and maybe you don’t think they’re doing what you think is best, but they are doing what they think is best. And... if you don’t agree with what’s being done, to have the support behind you, and to have a different perspective, makes understanding the decision easier.*

In the same focus group interview, another teacher commented, “I agree – if you have a good relationship with administration, you feel more supported and would tend to stay [at the school].” The teachers recognize that having a positive relationship with administrators would help them be more understanding of decisions they did not agree with.

One veteran teacher summed up the importance of relationships, “You are definitely more understanding with others when you have relationships with them.”

**Positive relationships.**

*I feel lucky enough to have good relationships with administration, but I recognize those that haven’t and I’ve seen some of those [teachers] come and go faster. I don’t know why, but there could be different reasons: professionalism, personality conflicts, or a combination of different things. Not everyone is in the good bucket. And this can be
divisive and that's a reason that some people may leave. I've always been supported and praised for my efforts - I don't have many personality conflicts with others.

This teacher mentioned an interesting phenomenon—that all teachers are not in the “good bucket” with an administrator, given that an administrator’s relationship with a teacher is influenced by many factors that affect the administrator’s perception of the teacher. Administrators’ support of teachers was identified as a positive factor in teacher retention. If a teacher felt positively about an administrator, it was because more often than not, the teacher felt supported by the administrator.

A veteran teacher mentioned that her relationship with her principal was very supportive and was a factor in her desire to stay at her school. From the day of her interview, she felt comfortable with her administrator, “As soon as I saw how at ease [administrator] was, I let loose and was super comfortable too.” She then shared,

*Here at the school, I seek out [principal]. I text [principal] a lot. We have like a sibling relationship and I can be myself and [principal] can tell me yes or no to my crazy ideas. I have [a diagnosed medical issue] and [administrator’s] been amazingly supportive of it. If I'm having a bad day, I need to take off or leave a meeting, [administrator] understands.*

She, as well as four other teachers mentioned that the level of trust an administrator has for his/her teachers affects their job satisfaction. When teachers know administrators trust their work—thought approval of initiatives and projects—they felt valued and trusted to make decisions for their students. Another veteran teacher shared that the administrators she appreciated over the years were those that were visible in the school, and checked in with teachers to see how they were doing. “I remember an administrator that would stand outside the building every morning and greet the students – [administrator] would say something to each student. They knew [administrator]. And [administrator] would check in with teachers to see how we were doing. That was important.” She recognized the effort the administrator placed on relationship building—the effort that was put into knowing the people on campus—through the administrator’s actions. This was highly valued. An early career teacher shared her appreciation for her administrator,
Our administrator was new, but took us as a team and she didn't try to come in and change everything - she's open to hearing our opinions and ideas. She has an open door and it's easy to talk to her. I think she's very supportive of us.

It was clear that the effort administrators placed in their relationships with teachers, and having an “open door” to listen to teachers was valued and a reason that teachers remained in their schools.

One teacher mentioned, “There's support from administration. Some people say that there isn't, but you have to seek it out. You need to find it.” This teacher had a strong sense of self-efficacy. She felt that if something was not provided, but needed, it was the responsibility of the teacher to seek out what was needed and not wait for the support to come to her.

**Negative Relationships.**

On the contrary, a negative relationship with administration was a primary factor for teachers’ discontent in their schools. The positive administrative support was a reason to stay at their school, and those that shared experiences of not having support or positive relationships with administrators identified it as a reason to contemplate leaving a school. The teachers expressed disappointment and anger with administrators who had not demonstrated efforts to build relationships with them or others. As stated earlier in this section, teachers were more likely to understand and tolerate decisions made by administrators when there was a positive relationship established. Two teachers mentioned their negative experiences with a former principal.

*This past principal was very dictator-like. We were yelled at, put down, people were told to leave if they didn't like it. That principal made a lot of people transfer out. Those that were here for a long time stuck it out, but many old timers retired. ... When you treat people badly, they will leave.*

The administrator did not

... think[ing] about the teachers, [The administrator] did not understand that the people that keep the school together, the glue, a big reason why the kids are successful was because of teachers who are dedicating our lives to the students. It’s the teachers who hold the school together.

An early career teacher who had some difficulty adjusting to her school and had curricular and classroom management challenges, shared her feelings about the amount of
support she received her first year of teaching, “I just needed to feel like [the administrators] were on my side and that we are here for the same purpose - to help the students.” This teacher felt that she was often told to figure things out on her own and had not been supported in the most meaningful ways. Had she received classroom observation feedback, and problem-solving discussions about her classroom management challenges, she said she would have felt more supported by administrators and would have had a different, better experience in her first year as a teacher.

These negative relationships and experiences had the opposite effect on teacher retention and negatively contributed to teacher retention rates, as teachers contemplated leaving their schools for these reasons.

**Building relationships.**

To combat negative teacher-administrator relationships in their schools, both elementary and secondary teachers stated the importance of administrators building relationships with their teachers. Although it seemed like “common sense” as one teacher put it, five teachers felt that their administrators had not placed enough or any effort into their relationships with teachers. They felt that this resulted in poor teacher-administrator relationships. One veteran teacher made an interesting point, “They always say in research: build relationships with kids, build relationships with kids, but the exact opposite happens with administration.” This topic emerged during a focus group interview. The teachers unanimously shared their feelings that although they were encouraged to build relationships with their students to create a positive classroom climate, their administrators often did not apply this concept to create a positive school climate with their teaching staff. Another teacher emphasized,

> If you want to retain teachers, you need to mentor them, you need to work with them, and you need to make them feel comfortable. To get people to stay, you need to support them.

> ... If you want us to motivate kids, you need to motivate us too!

The other five teachers felt that their administrators placed effort in and did a great job of building relationships. “Leadership helped me stay at the school. I always felt supported by [administrator] - everyone felt that way. [Administrator] worked hard to have people work together.” This teacher appreciated not only that her administrator emphasized a positive school climate by encouraging teachers to work together, but she also mentioned that her administrator
would verbally encourage individual teachers to support and mentor new teachers whom they would be working with when they were hired.

The teachers also valued the time administrators spent with them and their students. One teacher shared that he appreciated that former administrators attended student performances and out of school activities. He felt that it demonstrated the administrator’s involvement with the students and teachers, and showed support for school initiatives and programs. When administrators showed support in attendance of events and activities, it promoted the positive relationships between administrators, teachers, and students.

Teachers had strong ideas on how administrators could build positive or negative relationships with them and what the effects of these actions were on schools, teachers, and teacher retention.

**School vision and structures of support.**

Teachers, whether elementary or secondary, early career or veteran, all mentioned that a common school vision and organization were important factors that affected their job satisfaction and desire to remain in their schools. The teachers most content in their schools felt that their administrators had a vision for the school, structured the school programs according to the vision, and had a plan to execute the vision. For example, one teacher mentioned the school’s search for a school curriculum,

*The principal started trying everything to see what worked. We would pick up a program, try it for a year, and then if it didn't work, we'd try something else, and then something else until we found something that worked. Administration wasn't afraid to fail and try new things. It became this thing where everyone was working together, working together and trying things together. We weren't working alone.*

The teacher appreciated that no matter what the result was in trying a new curriculum, the administrator had been willing to work with the teachers, succeed or fail with the teachers, and was not afraid to discard a curriculum that was not working for the school. Oftentimes teachers are frustrated in constantly trying out new curriculum and not sticking to one for a length of time. In asking the teacher more about this, she shared that the process and result of the effort “was a shared feeling that we were all paddling at the same time and in the same canoe, moving forward together.” The other teacher participants at her school, both early career and veteran, mentioned the concerted effort on the curriculum and student achievement by administration and faculty as
All participants from this school mentioned their approval of the structure of the daily and weekly schedule to accommodate the chosen curriculum and the focus on student achievement.

As discussed earlier in the “formalized support” section, weekly meetings were scheduled so that teachers had opportunities to discuss successes, challenges, and how to address particular students’ needs. The meetings, called data teams, were collaborative and a designated time to share and analyze assessment data. Because of the structure of the meetings, teachers felt acknowledged for their successes, supported in their challenges, and were able to create plans to move students forward in their academics. All teachers appreciated the data team meeting time, particularly in discussing curriculum and analyzing student work.

*Giving teachers time to meet is important too. Like our data teams, that's where you can get support. I like the structure of the data teams–because it would be really hard to try to manage the amount of data and the constant interventions on my own. I look forward to that time.*

Another structure in place to support the school vision was time scheduled during the school day to work with struggling students in their areas of weakness. All classrooms incorporated this daily, which gave the teachers extra time to address the needs of their students. The teachers felt a sense of relief that there was a specified time when they can work more in depth with students who needed it. “[this time] is good because if the majority of the kids got a concept, I feel like I can move on because I know I have that time to work with the other kids later in the day.” The school’s vision and the administrator’s plan that addressed the vision gave the teachers a sense of support and collaboration, and a structure to their daily and weekly schedules that supported the goals.

On the other hand, teachers who felt that their schools had no clear vision, weak leadership or organization, and no support structures to implement the school’s plan were discontented with their administration, contributing to a desire to leave the school.

Six teachers identified lack of school organization as a factor that affected job satisfaction. They felt that lack of school organization was detrimental to the school–relationships between teachers, relationships between teachers and administrators, and student progress–when administrators do not have a clear plan to support the vision of the school.
[We have] different initiatives and different trainings and no direct line to a goal. ... There's a goal and dream for the school, but the path to get there is muddled. There's no direct path. We have so many trainings, different tools being thrown at us in the hopes we will get to that goal. How we will get to the goal is not a clear road.

The teachers said that when there was not a clear plan to achieve the school vision, there is confusion and lack of confidence in administration. This led to doubt and negative feelings toward administrators. Comparing two different administrators, one teacher said, “Nobody knows what's going on now and people feel unconnected. Administration set up structures and a process so that we felt connected with others [in the past].” Another teacher, in discussing the vision of the school and its emphasis on project-based learning (PBL),

*We have no time at all to do things like PBL—we still work in silos and the structures are not in place to integrate our curriculum. They want us to do it but we can’t because they don’t give us time or ways to. They can’t expect us to create an integrated curriculum in one day. It’s impossible.*

The same teacher expressed his desire for structure from administration so that the campus would have time to focus together on the vision and work more collaboratively, “They want us to connect but don’t give us time to.” Another teacher shared this experience, “It’s interesting because they want to push this collaborative teaching, but we don’t even know the teacher next door. We’re not given time to collaborate or get to know others.” The frustration was audible throughout the interviews and focus group meetings in regards to the lack of structure to move the school vision forward. The vision was there, but the structures to achieve the vision were not.

Another area of concern for the teachers was that administration was not making decisions that were needed to address problems at the school.

*Teachers want [administration] to be there and do something. Sometimes teachers’ hands are tied and can't go. It may take somebody else with more knowledge or more authority to move something forward. We're coming to you because we're at the end of our rope - no more options. There's a discrepancy in what support means by teachers and what administration thinks.*

The same teacher shared,

*There would need to be clarity and better understanding between administration and teachers about what support looks like. If I'm not getting the support I'm looking for, it...*
gets discouraging. Then it makes you wonder "what am I doing here?" especially when I'm not being heard and not being supported, and I'm the one in the classroom.

Another teacher at the same school mentioned, “I feel like we're all paddling at different times and we're not going anywhere. Like we're fighting each other. Teachers need more support but the interpretation is different by administration.” The support that teachers want and need in these cases seemed to be different from the support that administration felt that the teachers needed. In a previous section on negative teacher relationships, a teacher described a situation in which she felt that colleagues were unfairly being asked by administration to address a situation with a difficult situation with a peer. The definitions and understandings of support—support needed by teachers, and the support that was ultimately given by administrators—were not congruent, thus leading to teacher discontent. “There’s a discrepancy between what teachers want and need and requesting for support and what administration is giving.” One early career teacher said, “Everything [at school] would go better if administration would be more supportive. That would make being at [the school] 100% for me—that would be awesome.”

The role of an administrator, and his/her relationship to the teaching faculty is an important factor in teacher retention. As heard through these experiences, teachers’ job satisfaction was affected by administrator relationships and leadership, vision or lack thereof, and school organization.

Artifacts

The artifacts that participants brought to the interviews were a reflection of what they valued in education and in their teaching experiences. There was a wide range of artifacts. Due to confidentiality issues, the description of the artifacts will be general, and the photographs of the artifacts will not be shared.

Within the artifacts, the themes of: making a difference, appreciation, and relationships with students were evident. Teachers shared the following artifacts that represented all three aforementioned themes: a gift from a grandmother of a student—a fan with individual photos of students and the teacher, letters and drawings from students to their teacher, and a Christmas card with a $1.00 bill. These artifacts were physical representations of how the teachers knew they had made a difference with their students and their families. They were expressions of appreciation and illustrations of the positive relationships between the teachers and their students. All participants shared that the artifacts were important reminders to them that they played a
significant role as teachers—how they had made a difference—and their students’ gestures of gifts and letter giving were examples of the positive feelings that the students or their families had for them.

Four of the teachers’ artifacts were specifically focused on making a difference. They felt that their artifacts were symbolic of their reasons for teaching, which were the students and their own role in making a positive impact in the world through their role as educators. One teacher shared a class photograph of her and her students making funny faces at the camera. The photograph represented “having fun, …but also to know the importance of why we are here. It helps me remember why I’m here.”—that reason was the students and the knowledge that the teacher was a factor in their growth. Another teacher shared his master’s program thesis, which was on the topic of building the culture of the classroom. He felt it symbolized what he hoped to accomplish with his students and the impact he had on them. “Teaching the whole child, and learning about who is who and what they’re good at and what we can build up is important… honoring them [the students] for their strengths and differences.” Another teacher shared dirt as her artifact. She said,

Lots of times, students come to me and say that [community] is dirt…. There's no green. But I tell them that where there's dirt, there's potential. Something can grow. And symbolically, sometimes are students are held back by stereotypes but they have potential, and that is true for those that don't do well in school. You have to get the kids the right nutrients—nurturing, parenting, for them to get on the right track and be successful. I show the kids that when we water the grass for a couple of weeks the grass will grow. This was a powerful message. The teacher emphatically believed in her students and their potential. She saw in them what was possible and took that belief with her in her work and in her messages to her students. She knew that she made a difference to her students, especially in what they believed about themselves. Similarly, another teacher shared her water bottle as her artifact. She said,

Throughout the day, it's hot. This water bottle mimics a lot of things when I'm teaching. It's really big, and I always lose them! I have lost so many water bottles! I will leave it somewhere and forget where I left it. Sometimes I go for a while and forget to drink water. In that sense, like in teaching, I always have the heart for kids and teaching, but some days I forget that and wonder what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. And then
Sometimes I'm so hungry I just drink my water. The water fills me. Sometimes you think you want something else, but no, this is what I love to do. No matter what, I come back to what I do and why.

This teacher was acutely aware that it was easy to forget why she wanted to be a teacher, but that the students and making a difference were the reasons why she chose the profession. She went on to share that when she reflects on her students and their progress, it satisfies her and keeps her teaching in her school.

Two other teachers shared other artifacts—the school’s graduates, and a copy of the school’s yearbook. The artifacts represented products of their work in teaching, and how they had been an influential part of students’ lives. The graduates and the yearbook were concrete reminders of what they had accomplished as teachers—the students as products of their role in education, and the yearbook as a representation of the annual accomplishment of the teacher.

The stories that the teachers shared about their artifacts were emotional and touching reminders of why the teachers taught, and what they valued in their careers.

The analysis of the data collected in this study revealed five factors that affected teacher retention in the participants’ schools. The students, making a difference, teacher perspectives and community understanding, support and relationships with colleagues, and the role of administration contributed to the teachers’ desire to remain teaching in their schools.

Interestingly, the responses between the secondary and elementary teachers contained both similarities and differences. There were differences between the secondary and elementary teachers regarding the Teach for America program. This gave interesting insight into the effects of that particular program on teacher retention in the participants’ schools—particularly the secondary schools. Most significantly, the secondary teachers focused much of their concern on the dynamic between new teachers, TFA teachers, and mainland recruits. Although the elementary teachers acknowledged similar concerns about TFA teachers and the impact of this program on teacher retention, they did not share the same observations and feelings as the secondary teachers.

The following chapter will discuss the implications of the findings, and give suggestions for future work on teacher retention in schools and for future research.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice

This chapter is organized into several areas, including a summary of the study and its findings, discussion of the findings, implications of the findings, future recommendations, and conclusion.

This research study was focused on understanding the factors that influenced teachers to remain teaching in their high needs Title I schools in Hawai‘i.

Summary of Study and Findings

Teachers leave the profession or their schools of employment for a variety of reasons. Some of which are: lack of administrative support; inadequate facilities; inadequate salary; large amounts of paperwork; difficult-to-manage students, and minimal input into organizational decision-making. (Changying, 2008; Hong, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Conversely, if the aforementioned factors are reversed, it is assumed that teachers would be more likely to remain in their schools or in the profession. Thus, it would seem that if there were administrative support, increased salaries, minimal paperwork, minimal classroom management challenges, and having teacher voice, teachers would have more job satisfaction.

This study’s participants were 10 teachers from one Department of Education complex on the island of O’ahu. The 10 teachers were employed by three, high needs Title I schools of varying school levels—elementary, intermediate, and high school. Title I schools were the focus of this research because of their high rates of teacher attrition, and because of the historical challenges they face with academic achievement. The objective of the study was to explore the factors that influence teachers to remain in these schools. With this understanding, future teachers employed by these schools may be better supported, and teacher retention and student achievement would increase.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit and select the participants of the study. The teachers’ demographic information, educational background, and career information were acquired through a survey. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with each participant and those that were able or chose to participated in a focus group interview. Data was coded and analyzed for common themes and member checks were completed to ensure reliability.

The results of this study were not surprising. A portion of the results of this study was common to the factors mentioned in the literature in relation to teacher attrition. The factors that influenced the teacher participants within this study to remain in their schools were: the students,
Discussion of Results

Teacher Attrition.

The literature on teacher attrition identifies common reasons that teachers leave their schools or the profession. The most common reasons are: paperwork, large class sizes, lack of administrative support, inadequate facilities, inadequate salary, challenging student behavior, and minimal input into organizational decision-making. (Changying, 2008; Dillon, 2009; Haberman, 2004; Hong, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Of the factors mentioned, the factors that influenced this study’s teacher participants’ retention in their schools were: administrative support, student behavior, and input into decision-making. Other factors that emerged that kept the teachers in their schools were: students, relationships with colleagues, making a difference and the acknowledgement of it, and administrators and their vision. Vice versa, when a factor was noticeably absent in the working environment, it influenced the teacher negatively and contributed to his/her job dissatisfaction. These results are consistent with Johnson, Kraft, and Papay’s (2012) assertion that:

… although a wide range of working conditions matter to teachers, the specific elements of the work environment that matter the most to teachers are not narrowly conceived “working conditions” such as clean and well-maintained facilities or access to modern instructional technology. Instead, it is the social conditions–the school’s culture, the principal’s leadership, and relationships among colleagues–that predominate in predicting teachers’ job satisfaction and career plans. (p.3-4)

The reasons that teachers leave their schools are very different from the reasons they stay. The literature identifies some of the working conditions factors that negatively affect teacher retention, such as inadequate salary, inadequate facilities, paperwork and large class size. However, it is the social conditions of the school that keep them there.
Making a Difference.

Making a difference was a reason that teachers remained in the profession. This finding was not surprising. Teachers often share that the reason they chose to become a teacher was to “make a difference.” The nature of the teaching profession is often described as a self-less job, and teachers will often state the reason that they chose to become a teacher was to make a difference in the world. Many would agree with Sonia Nieto, a renowned teacher educator and professor emerita at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, when she says, “Teachers can and do exert a great deal of power and influence in the lives of their students” (2003, p. 19). She asserts that “Teaching involves trust and respect as well as close, special relationships between students and teachers. It is, simply put, a vocation based on love” (Nieto, 2003, p. 37). In defining love, she believes that it “is not simply a sentimental conferring of emotion; it is a blend of confidence, faith, and admiration for students and appreciation for the strengths they bring with them” (Nieto, 2003, pp. 37-38). In this vein, teaching is placed in a social context—within relationships and appreciation for others, or within social conditions (Johnson et al., 2012). The belief, then, that teachers make a difference and that this understanding would greatly influence their decisions to remain in the profession makes sense. All teacher participants shared the variety of ways in which they made a difference in their students’ lives, in their schools, and with pre-service teachers. The teacher participants’ sense of social justice and activism, coupled with observed progress in student behavior, academics, and school success, revealed their feelings and understandings that they had made a difference in their careers.

Ethics of Teaching.

The literature on teaching is ripe with examples of teachers making a difference and these examples are often and rightfully celebrated. What was evident from the study’s results was the enjoyment that making a difference gave the teachers. It gave them a sense of accomplishment, fulfillment, and satisfaction. The feeling, evidence, and knowledge that the teachers had made a difference increased their job satisfaction and thus increased their intent to stay within their schools. Higgins’ Ethics of Teaching is based on this understanding. “Ethics deals with what we prize, that it examines the worth of activities. The ethics of teaching, then, must be that domain of inquiry concerned with whether and why the activity of teaching is worthwhile to the teacher.” (Higgins, 2003, p. 134). Part of this ethic is revealed in the question, “What would make my life meaningful, excellent, or rich?” (Higgins, 2003, p. 135). The act of teaching, according to
Higgins, is not only a self-less act, but selfish, as it provides the teacher with a sense of purpose and allows the person to feel that they are leading a “good life”, and “ … how tending to the growth of others nourishes the teacher’s own growth.” (Higgins, 2003, p. 135). Similarly, according to Charlton and Kritsonis, “…the work must fulfill some need, aside from the financial, that each teacher uses to define her life’s purpose (2009, p. 50). Teachers’ sense of worth was positively influenced by the knowledge they had made a difference.

The teachers in this study chose to teach and continued to teach as a result of the difference they made in their students’ lives and in their schools. High needs Title I schools have particular challenges, and those challenges make working in these schools often harder than in other communities. Because of the challenges, seven teachers stated similarly “I would be able to make more of a difference here than in another school in another community.” The student population of the school and the challenges of the community gave the teachers a stronger resolve to teach there. Cochran-Smith (2006), shared Sonia Nieto’s belief that … good teachers stay in teaching—even in the most difficult of circumstances and with the most marginalized students—for reasons that have more to do with loving and dreaming—with teaching’s heart—than with either its physical conditions or the availability of the latest techniques. (p. 11)

The teachers in this study also felt they made a difference in the academic progress of their students. Charlton and Kritsonis (2009) argue that positively influencing student learning affects teacher retention, as there is a sense of personal satisfaction in seeing and having been a part of a student’s growth and progress. It is important for teachers to see their contribution and its effects on school progress. Often, this is one of the clearest ways a teacher sees the difference that s/he has made in a student’s life. Through summative and formative assessments, observations and discussions with students, teachers are able to witness the progress students make as a result of their efforts. Teachers not only felt servitude toward their students, but also received fulfillment in making a difference for their students as well, encouraging their retention in their schools. These teachers’ feelings and understandings of fulfillment in their schools are examples of Higgins’ belief about the Ethics of Teaching.

**Leadership.**

Not only did the teachers feel that they made a difference in their students’ lives, but they felt successful and fulfilled knowing they made a difference to their Title I schools. Charlton and
Kritsonis (2009) assert that, “Teachers must believe that they make a difference in the lives they touch and must believe that they contribute to the organization’s value” (p. 51). For the teachers in this study, knowing that they had an effect on the larger organization of the school and not just in their classrooms was a factor that influenced them to stay at their schools. Notably, one teacher said that it would have been difficult to leave knowing that she had been a part of the positive progress of her school. “Career teachers recognize their roles in furthering the mission, vision and goals for the learning community” (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2009, p. 52). Teachers identified mentoring pre-service teachers, and the projects and programs that they initiated, planned, and sustained as other ways that they knew they made a difference. The teachers took on roles and responsibilities that went beyond their daily classroom duties, and did so positively and with enthusiasm. These tasks and responsibilities were examples and indicators of teacher leadership. Danielson (2006) contends that teacher leaders have particular characteristics and work within the conditions and opportunities within their schools that promote their own retention.

For teachers to benefit from leadership, principals need to afford them these opportunities. According to Kohm and Nance (2009), principals can foster this in their teachers by “…sharing responsibility with teachers as often as possible and by helping them develop skills that foster collaborative problem solving” (p. 68). In the cases of teachers who described their leadership roles in their schools, they either initiated these opportunities themselves, as in the projects and programs they developed, or they were given the option to take the opportunity, such as those teachers who mentored pre-service teachers. In all cases, the teachers shared that the outcome was positive and influenced their professional development and desire to remain at their schools. The teachers felt a sense of ownership in the initiatives and efficacious in the completed programs, tasks, and projects. Dauksas and White (2010) stress that teachers should be “able to raise and respond to critical issues in their classrooms. They must be given opportunities to work as problem solvers” (p. 30). In these ways, they take ownership of their work and their voices are given the opportunity to be heard. The literature on retention is clear—when teachers feel empowered to make instructional decisions, they feel valued and have a sense of autonomy, influencing their job satisfaction and affecting their retention in their schools (Cockburn & Haydn, 2004; Dillon, 2009). “Most teachers accept leadership as a reward in itself: they derive a
sense of self-worth from having their voices heard, developing vision, or serving their students and colleagues” (Gabriel, 2005, p. 21).

Ultimately, when teachers are given opportunities to step into leadership roles, students, schools, and the teachers themselves benefit.

An environment that promotes strength and possibility is better able to deal with the inevitable challenges that occur in our schools. Teachers remain in teaching if they learn to anticipate problems, realize that problems have solutions, and see themselves as a part of the solution. (Dauksas & White, 2010, p. 31)

The results of this study showed that when teachers took on leadership roles, they felt a sense of accomplishment and contribution to the school community. In their own individual ways, their voices were heard through their work and ownership of the their respective initiatives. This led to a greater sense of satisfaction and job commitment. “Most people want to feel that they are part of something significant, that what they do matters, and that they are contributing members to a common goal that affects achievement. Teacher leadership meets this need because it creates a greater sense of ownership, buy-in, and community” (Gabriel, 2005, p. 20).

The fulfillment of making a difference in their work, whether through initiatives, student progress, or leadership was a factor that affected the teacher participants’ retention in their Title I schools, echoing Higgins’ (2003) Ethics of Teaching and other literature on making a difference (Nieto, 2003) and teacher leadership (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2009; Danielson, 2006; Kohm & Nance, 2009).

**Administrative support.**

The results revealed that the teachers who had positive relationships with and felt appreciated by their administrators felt supported by their schools and increased their desire to remain teaching. One secondary veteran teacher mentioned that the first phone call she received from her administrator made her feel at ease and comfortable, which contributed to her desire to initially work at her school. Over time, the same teacher felt the support of her administrator through easy communication and the principal’s approval of projects for her students and classroom. When teachers’ need are met and supported by administration, they are better able to support and give their students what they need in their classrooms.
Positive relationships.

Other teachers shared their feelings that they were supported by their administrators and were acknowledged verbally and through support of their work with their students. Praise and respect are critical elements in effective leadership, as described by Todd Whitaker (2003), in his book *What Great Principals Do Differently: Fifteen Things That Matter Most*. He asserts that it is necessary for an effective leader to treat people with understanding and respect. This contributed to the study participants’ desire to continue to work at their schools.

The teachers felt an organizational commitment to their schools because of the support of their administrators. They felt loyalty to their schools, knowing they were acknowledged and appreciated. They felt that their work was valued and in turn were more inclined to have positive job satisfaction.

Dr. Sandra Harris (2008) conducted a study on successful secondary principals. She found that the principals in this study had similar leadership characteristics:

- Leadership with a mission;
- Leadership that shapes positive campus culture;
- Leadership for communication and collaboration;
- Leadership for curriculum and instruction;
- Leadership for school improvement; and
- Leadership for personalizing the learning environment.

In particular, for those teachers who felt supported at their schools, the “leadership that shapes positive campus culture” was experienced. The principals who promoted this positive culture emphasized and focused on ways to nurture relationships and trust teachers so that its teachers, students, and all stakeholders were successful. Principals also had a mission. This mission was the principal’s purpose and vision for the school and how s/he accomplished the mission.

Part of the principals’ mission, according to Harris (2008), was also focused on building strong, positive, caring relationships with teachers, which encouraged the faculty’s job commitment. As mentioned in the results, this study’s teacher participants acknowledged that having a relationship with their administrator was instrumental in them being more understanding of decisions made that were not necessarily aligned with what they wanted, believed, or agreed with. This understanding of an administrator’s decisions—whether agreed upon by his/her teachers—was critical in keeping a positive climate at a school. Too often, as I
have witnessed, teachers who experience a negative working environment, do not feel supported in their work, and their discontent grows. Once the discontent wraps around the school, morale declines and is hard to bring back up, affecting teacher retention and the desire to remain at a school.

Robert Greenleaf, a former 40-year AT&T employee and Director of Leadership Development, identified and coined the idea of “Servant Leadership” in the early 1970s. The understanding, adoption, and implementation of this idea would serve administrators well. The servant leader is based on the belief of the leader as servant. Greenleaf believed, from his own managerial experiences, that in order to be a great leader, one needed to be a servant to others first (Spears, 2004). The servant leader takes care to ensure that other’s needs are being served and met. In this way, the leader is now working for those being led. If administrators hope to be effective leaders, principals should be thoughtful in serving their teachers and students to create a positive work climate. If teachers’ needs are met, then they will have an easier time in meeting the needs of their own students. Charlton and Kritsonis (2009) assert, “Exceptional principals realize that teachers whose own needs are met by the administration have a much easier time meeting the needs of students, and will go the extra mile for those students when times are tough” (p. 55). This sentiment was evident in one teacher’s commentary about the way she believed administrators should relate to teachers,

... it’s like customer service. I’m administration’s customer. If I don’t like being there, I will leave. And our students are our customers. If we don’t have students, we don’t have a school. ... I think if administration saw us as customers, they would take care of us better.

**Praise and acknowledgement.**

In this study, a few of the teachers mentioned that they were acknowledged by their administrators and that they appreciated this acknowledgement and validation. However, the general sentiment overall was administrators did not often acknowledge their teachers. Although the teachers shared that the acknowledgement from students was more important to them, some did share that acknowledgement by their administrators and employer would be welcomed. Charlton and Kritsonis (2009) assert that when teachers are acknowledged and positively recognized by those in leadership roles, they provide a way for teachers to measure and understand their value and help their professional self-esteem. Danielson (2006) argues “The
culture of the school has an important influence on how the school operates and the extent to which it can achieve positive results for its students. The contributions of administrators … are critical” (p. 45). The administrator sets the culture and climate of the school. When a positive culture is created, with administrators acknowledging the work of teachers, teachers are more apt to feel appreciated and committed to their schools. As administrators focus on their teachers, students receive the benefits. Whitaker (2003) suggests, “Great principals focus on students–by focusing on teachers” (p. 35) and that administrators need to understand and nurture school stakeholders’ emotional needs, which encourages a positive school climate. These elements, including acknowledgment of teachers’ efforts are critical components in encouraging a positive school climate. This component was missing from most teachers’ experiences.

For the purposes of this discussion, the Hawai‘i State DOE, the teachers’ employer, will also be discussed in this section on administration. It was clear that the veteran teachers who were acknowledged by the DOE did not place value on the acknowledgement given them. The pens, certificates, and pins seemed to them to be trivial acknowledgements of the amount of time they had invested in the DOE. Notably, the early career teachers did not identify acknowledgement by the DOE as a factor that would affect their decisions to remain in their profession. However, for the veteran teachers, it was a contentious issue. This suggests that over time, those who have been in a profession for a while may need more validation from their employer. Those early in their careers seemed to receive enough acknowledgment from their students and their students’ families. One veteran teacher shared that she realized recently that she could not reach all of her students and affect their academic progress as much as she hoped to. Another teacher asked aloud, “I wonder if I’m just more jaded now?” when discussing her influence on student learning. In these moments, when teachers felt that they were more realistic or cynical about their influence on students, their sense of efficacy and professional self-esteem seemed to be affected. Having acknowledgement from the DOE or an administrator may help teachers to keep motivated, particularly the veteran teachers. Teachers early in their careers seemed to not need administrator or employer acknowledgement as much as the veteran teachers. Although the veteran teachers shared that they made a difference to their students and students’ families, what was missing was adequate acknowledgement by their administrators and employer. Fischer (2005), asserts that “… appreciation and support resonate profoundly with teachers and can provide enough motivation for them to remain in a profession that has been accused on many
levels of undervaluing them” (p. 51). Fischer (2005) also stresses that it is of great importance to maintain a high level of employer-employee involvement throughout the length of an employees’ career in the organization. Without this, the employee will not know how the employer views their work, and could affect their motivation to remain in their job. Charlton and Kritsonis (2009) maintain, “Many organizations subscribe to the notion that increased employee satisfaction leads to increased customer satisfaction. In education, teachers who feel appreciated and adequately compensated will transfer these benefits to the students they serve” (p. 50). Again, in a trickle-down effect, the DOE and administrators should keep their clients, or students in mind, by acknowledging their teachers. This acknowledgement would affect the teachers’ commitment to their school and their job satisfaction, and in turn affect their work with their students positively.

*Vision implementation.*

In relation to support from administrators, the teacher participants also emphasized their belief that an administrator’s vision and the structures for its implementation were of the utmost importance for school organization. Without this in place, teachers did not understand how school goals were being accomplished and addressed. They felt that it was “not a clear road” and led to confusion. Those that felt that the school was organized according to its vision and goals were clear in their responsibilities and that everyone in the school was working together towards common objectives. Charlton and Kritsonis (2009), in their article on human resource management, argue “alignment is the practice of ensuring that all pieces of the puzzle fit” (p. 59). They believe that aligning the parts of an organization—such as the vision, structures to accomplish the vision, and its employees—leads to great organizational effectiveness. “Alignment, coupled with the tutelage of an effective leader, reaffirms that improved teacher retention will result” (2009, p. 59). This sentiment was clear in teachers’ discussions about the lack of structures in place to achieve their school’s vision. The teachers were frustrated and did not understand how the school’s vision was being accomplished when the message by administration was in conflict with what their actions were. The teachers understood the school’s vision of wanting to move toward more PBL, however, the structures and opportunities for this were not in place. Thus, the teachers were frustrated with how to accomplish school initiatives and the vision of the administrator without the proper avenues to do so.

According to Hughes (2012), administrators have an immense effect on teacher retention. Teachers desire to work in schools with supportive administrators with clear vision and
expectations. Therefore, administrators need to have a vision, and a clear plan to implement it. Administrators need to realize their influence and use their influence to positively support their teachers and students.

**Students in Poverty.**

Haberman’s (2004) research and his book on Star Teachers characterizes teachers who are most effective with diverse students and youth in poverty as those that are motivated and skilled to work with this population. They also focus on their students, build and maintain positive relationships with them, their families, and their coworkers, have high expectations of their students, and take responsibility for their teaching and students’ learning.

Although this study did not explore the issue of the participants’ effectiveness or seek to measure how effective the teachers were in their Title I schools, the teachers believed that they made a difference in their work—whether in student or school progress, or school or class programs, and were, in these ways, effective. As the literature review maintains, teacher retention is affected by teachers’ perceptions of their effectiveness with students. The perceptions of effectiveness by the participants influenced their decisions to remain in their schools, drawing on their feelings and acknowledgements by others that they had made a difference.

Of the ten teachers in the study, nine were motivated to work with the students in their Title I schools. As noted, one early career elementary teacher identified the negative aspects of the community more readily and more frequently than the other teachers, and did share her intent to eventually transfer to another school. The nine other teachers were positive in their discussions about their students and families and in their work experiences. They acknowledged the families’ hardships and challenges, but were also quick to identify their positive qualities. This understanding of the community and the issues of poverty seemed to have a positive effect on the teachers’ work. The teachers’ positive perspective helped them to more easily work and interact with their students and their families, understanding their personal situations and being flexible with them. The early career teacher shared that she had difficulty identifying with the students and community and did not have the same values. With this perspective and disconnect, it was difficult for her to work with the students as it challenged her interactions with them. Robinson (2007) found that, based on his study of more than 400 teachers of low-income students in San Diego, California, that teachers who had a deficit view of their students were
unhappier in their jobs than their peers who rejected the deficit view. They were also better at responding to their students’ needs. They had an understanding of class inequity and its resulting societal challenges, thus making it easier for them to meet the needs of their students in poverty. Gorski asserts, “… letting go of our deficit views and focusing, instead, on student strengths and resilience is good for teaching, but it’s also good for teacher morale, a win-win” (2013, p. 135). In the case of the teacher who had difficulty in understanding the community and her students, this was true. Her morale affected her perspective and did not allow her to see her students’ strengths and the strengths of the community.

Star Teachers also focus on their students, and build and maintain positive relationships with them, their families and coworkers. All teachers within the study demonstrated this trait. They were cognizant of and intentional about their relationships. All teachers took pride in the ways that they developed and maintained their relationships with their peers and students. This was evident in their interview responses and artifacts. Although academic goals were very important to these teachers, more often than not, they mentioned that developing “good people” and being sure that their students knew that, “… they [were] more important to me than knowing [content].” They prioritized their relationships with their students and their positive relationships with low-income families. They also put their students’ progress into perspective, according to their own priority of building positive relationships with their students. One teacher shared that it was important for her to have her students understand themselves as learners. “We are so concerned about test scores,… I care about it, but don't. … I would rather have them walk out of here confident in their ability to learn and know they are more than [a test score].” This illustrated Gorski’s belief that

Instructional strategies are important, but they mean nary a whit if we don’t build strong, positive relationships with low-income families. … So every practical strategy in the world … will not work if we treat poor and working class youth or their families, even in the most implicit ways, as though they are broken or some lesser “other.” (2013, p. 132)

For teachers that had positive relationships with their students’ families, these bonds helped them to better understand their students and be able to meet their needs and work with them. As shared, one secondary teacher described those moments when she needed to be flexible with her students, as when they arrived tardy to school. She had to decide whether it warranted the consequence of being sent to the office. She felt that oftentimes, it was not the student’s fault
for being late, so she chose not to punish them for something out of their control. This perspective helped her to better navigate working with her students. She chose a particular way in which to view the situation, where another teacher may have easily laid down the law and no matter what the circumstance, sent the student to the office. What effect would that have on the student? What consequence would that have on their attitude about school? This example demonstrates the value in the empathy the teachers had for their students and families. The teacher who was understanding about why parents were not reading or doing homework with their children at home knew that due to circumstances like long workdays, and having two jobs affected their time at home and time spent with their children. Instead of being upset about the effect it was having on her class and the student’s academic progress, the teacher acknowledged the difficulties of the parents and that they were doing the best for their family. Studies suggest that it “is not that low-income families don’t care about education, but that without understanding a fuller picture of inequality and the challenges faced by poor families, it can be easy for teachers to assume a lack of interest on the parts of parents and of the caretakers” (Gorski, 2013, p. 5). One assumption of the deficit view is that families in poverty have the same access to and opportunities that other, middle and upper class families have. This is, unfortunately, not true. The majority of the teacher participants in this study understood that life was unfair to their students, that they lacked access to certain opportunities, and were disadvantaged for a number of reasons. This perspective allowed the teachers more flexibility and understanding in working with their students and families.

The teacher that had the most difficulty at her school was notably the one who had difficulty connecting to the students, families, and community. She shared that her values did not align with what she believed were the community’s values, and as a result had difficulty empathizing with them. This had an effect on her job satisfaction. The other nine teachers acknowledged and understood the challenges of the community and worked with and around these challenges. Robinson (2007) contemplates,

Is there a “culture of poverty”? Cultural deficit models locate responsibility for achievement gaps between groups within individuals (i.e., “blame the victim”). Such models contend that the poor and ethnic minorities subscribe to values that are not the same as those of the middle or upper classes. (p. 182)
Robinson (2007) believes that the deficit model is responsible for the widening achievement gap across different socioeconomic groups. The community understanding and the rejection of the deficit model of thinking made it easier for the teachers in this study to work with their students and relieved them of fighting against the challenges of the students and the community, but worked with them instead.

Based on research, Gorski (2013) identified 10 Principles of Equity Literacy for Educators and Students in Poverty with the objective of having a “more robust and meaningful understanding of what it takes to provide every student access to the best possible education” (p. 23). The principles are as follows:

1. “The right to equitable educational opportunity is universal.
2. Poverty and class are intersectional in nature.
3. Poor people are diverse.
4. What we believe, including our biases and prejudices, about people in poverty informs how we teach and relate to people in poverty.
5. We cannot understand the relationship between poverty and education without understanding biases and inequities experienced by people in poverty.
6. Test scores are inadequate measures of equity.
7. Class disparities in education are the result of inequities, not the result of cultures.
8. Equity-literate educators recognize and draw upon the resiliencies and other funds of knowledge accumulated by poor and working class individuals and communities, and reject deficit views that focus on fixing disenfranchised students rather than fixing the things that disenfranchise students.
9. Strategies for bolstering school engagement and learning must be based on evidence for what works.
10. The inalienable right to equitable educational opportunity includes the right to high expectations, higher-order pedagogies, and engaging curricula.” (2013, pp. 24-25)

This study’s results were consistent with principles four and eight. It was clear that, as principle four states, the teachers’ biases and beliefs informed the way they related to their students and their families—whether they were understanding of their situations or not. This was in relation to principle eight, in that these biases and beliefs affected whether they felt they needed to fix the
student, or if the student’s situation was a result of the “system”. The teachers that rejected the deficit view understood that they were not there to “fix” the student, but worked with them and their role was to support and facilitate their progress. Similarly, Nieto (2003) professes particular characteristics and beliefs of teachers of diverse students, some of which are:

- “Staying committed to students in spite of obstacles that get in the way
- Viewing parents and other community members as partners in education
- Placing a high value on students’ identities” (pp. 38-39)

One secondary teacher mentioned that she felt her role was to help her students see themselves as part of their own community. She knew that some of her students felt removed from their community and culture, and she felt one of her responsibilities was to help them see their place in their world. Instead of the deficit view, this teacher promoted the connection between her students and their culture and community, valuing it instead of devaluing it.

Nine of the ten teachers in this study understood the community of their students and rejected the deficit view of poverty. Because of their understanding and flexibility with their students and their circumstances, their job satisfaction and commitment were positively influenced.

**Relationships.**

Clearly, positive relationships between teachers, students, administrators, and students’ families were important to teacher participants’ desire to remain at their schools. Guin (2004), and Bryk and Schneider (2003) identify positive relationships and a sense of community as having an effect on teacher attrition. The literature on teacher attrition identifies positive workgroup cohesion as a reason that teachers will remain in the profession, or conversely leave if there is a negative school climate. Charlton and Kritsonis (2009), discuss the reason teachers remain in the profession, even through their challenges,

…because they like to work with students. Teachers who demonstrate this attitude are natural educators and nurturers. … Their personal satisfaction lies in seeing students learn and in facilitating the process. They may rail against the establishment but their dedication is to the children. The teacher-student relationships and their personal commitment to education keep them in the classroom. (p. 51)

This was evident throughout the interviews with the teachers in this study. Although the teachers identified their challenges with various school personnel–from administrators to teachers–
curriculum, and the DOE system, the factor that encouraged the teachers to remain teaching was in their positive relationships with their colleagues and students.

The teacher participants discussed their personal relationships with their peers as a reason that they did not quit the profession when there were huge challenges. Danielson, 2006, shares that “Teachers in a well-functioning school treat their colleagues with respect, both personal and professional” (p. 48).

The most pervasive aspect of school culture concerns the manner in which individuals relate to one another. More than any other single factor, the manner in which people are treated influences their attitude toward an institution. Every person, as an individual and as a representative of a role, participates in the network of relationships within the school and school community (Danielson, 2006, p. 46).

It makes sense that the climate of the school is dependent upon the relationships between all stakeholders. When personnel feel comfortable, valued, and acknowledged by others, and are able to constructively work together to better the school, it results in a positive climate. Dauksas and White (2010) suggest that teachers will be more likely to commit to their schools when there are professional and personal relationships developed between administrators and teachers. I would also argue that those outside of these two groups should also be considered in these positive relationships as well.

**Mentoring and Induction.**

The results clearly showed that the teachers in this study were positively influenced by the informal and formal supports and relationships with their colleagues. This finding is consistent with the current literature on the subject of informal mentoring and formal support.

Research on mentoring suggests that teachers who are mentored and supported in their schools will more likely stay in the profession (Kapadia, Coca, & Easton, 2007; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). All teachers indicated that they received welcomed support from their peers and felt that this support had been vital to their success and survival. Cockburn and Haydn (2004) assert that the teachers who feel a positive mentoring climate are more inclined to enjoy their work environment. The teachers in this study, whether elementary or secondary, early career or veteran, voiced their appreciation and need for this mentoring support and positive climate.
Formal Support.

The teachers appreciated and valued the formal support at their schools—such as those given by their curriculum coordinators, administrators, and peers. The elementary teachers identified their structured weekly data team meeting times as valuable to their professional development. The structured time given to discuss their challenges and successes, and student work and assessment data, were critical to their curriculum planning and implementation. These formal supports were put in place by the school, and supported the teachers’ work in their classrooms. Teachers all felt similarly, as one teacher shared:

We have such good people here and no matter what grade level, you would get support. The data team support comes from the structure that the principal has in place with the coaches. These are ALL our students—the more we help each other, the more we're helping all of our students. ... Without the set [data team] time, there's no time to meet with your team other than that. During this time, we talk about our problems and we give suggestions on what we can do. We feel accountable there.

As suggested in the previous section, principals need to structure their teachers’ schedules to allow time for discussion and collaboration (Johnson et al., 2012). This teacher referenced her principal’s inclusion of the structured time during the week to allow for discussion and collaboration. This same teacher shared that she felt that without the structure of the data teams, she would consider leaving the school. She said “It would be really hard to try to manage the amount to data and the constant interventions on my own.” She appreciated the structure of the data teams and that it was included in her weekly schedule and was allowed time to discuss her student progress and to plan interventions with her grade level. This is consistent with Cockburn and Haydn’s (2004) research findings that teachers want and need to be supported in their teaching curriculum and by their colleagues. This improves job satisfaction and in turn positively affects teacher retention.

Danielson (2006), identifies constructive and collaborative teacher relationships that work in favor of a school:

Teachers may have honest—and professional—disagreements about many issues confronting them, … In working their way through these issues, members of the staff must be committed to an honest examination of evidence, a free airing of differences of opinion, and the presumption of positive intentions from everyone. Teachers must
understand that their disagreements, which may be deep, are a result of professional differences in approach and that, although they may rest on different assumptions, they are all help with the best interests of students in mind. That is, teachers must treat one another with genuine respect and recognize that when they disagree with their colleagues, they may be challenging another individual’s ideas, but they are not attacking the person (p. 49).

This was the case in the aforementioned data team teacher meetings. This structure was important for the teachers in providing the opportunity for curricular discussions to take place, while keeping the goal of student academic success in mind. One secondary teacher shared this about his experience with his teacher team, “[They are] open, collaborative, communicative, and [we] agree to disagree–some people might take things personally but they are ok with moving on. It doesn't keep us from moving forward.”

Formally structured mentor relationships were not mentioned by any of the teachers. At the time of the study, the DOE had induction and mentoring positions provided for each District. However, if specific DOE mentors were assigned to the early career teachers in the study, there was no mention of them. As discussed in the literature review, formal mentoring within school systems increases the likelihood of teacher retention, and would make this program beneficial to the individual teachers and schools. However, no conclusions were made regarding the formal mentoring support that the DOE was providing its teachers, as there was an absence of data in this area.

**Informal Mentoring.**

Clearly apparent, throughout the interviews and focus group meetings was the emphasis on informal mentoring as a factor that kept teachers teaching in their schools. The teacher participants did not use the term “informal mentoring” in their discussions, but referred to this concept often. “Informal mentorships are not managed, structured, nor formally recognized by the organization. Traditionally, they are spontaneous relationships that occur without external involvement from the organization” (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992, p. 620). Desimone et al. (2014) identify informal mentors as “people whom new teachers themselves choose to go for help” (p.88). As a result of this study, I would argue that informal mentors are not only sought out by and benefit new teachers, but by a myriad of teachers, veteran and new alike.
Informal mentoring seemed more important and more influential to the teachers than their formal supports—at least the concept came up more often in their interviews, and the depth of the discussion about it was more intense. The informal mentoring was a result of teachers’ positive relationships with their peers at their schools. Whether elementary or secondary, all teachers discussed the ways in which their informal, personal relationships with fellow teachers at their schools influenced their job satisfaction. The teachers discussed in detail how their relationships were the cornerstone of their survival and success. Without the support of their colleagues, they felt that they would have easily quit the profession and left their classrooms. Often, it was just the talk story moments or moments of empathy that helped teachers’ morale and kept them from feeling alone. Problem-solving was not as important as being able to have someone understand what they were going through—their successes, and mainly their challenges. One teacher shared, “Unless you have someone teaching the same thing you are and you can discuss situations, you’re by yourself all the time, making decisions. It’s a lonely job.” One would not likely think of teaching as a “lonely job,” but reflecting on this teacher’s sentiment, other teachers agreed. Teachers are in their classrooms with no other adults, making thousands of decisions a day on their own. Self-doubt can hamper a teacher’s feeling of efficacy and could cause one to feel alone, as this teacher sometimes would. These thoughts align with Nieto’s (2003) findings about her teacher focus group on teacher retention:

> Although teaching remains a lonely profession, the teachers no longer felt as if they were walking into their classrooms alone. When they experience a close companionship among their peers, teachers often feel as if their colleagues—or at least their colleagues’ wisdom and insights—are walking in with them (p. 124).

As discussed, two veteran elementary teachers shared these examples, “I go next door and say ‘I need therapy!’ and we don’t come up with real solutions, but being able to talk and share stories is so helpful,” and “[the teachers] are sympathetic and help me to put things into perspective.” Notably, these were not early career teachers, but veteran teachers of more than ten years. It was clear that teachers, both early career and veteran needed those informal supports and relationships to help them through their challenges, or just to feel understood.

Another benefit of mentoring that was shared by one of the veteran teachers during a focus group, was that often early career teachers have a difficult time reflecting on or seeing their successes. She said,
New teachers need a mentor or a colleague at the school who they trust and who can give them feedback. Sometimes it takes a veteran teacher to recognize what’s happening and what gains are being made. Sometimes, three seconds in a classroom, teachers can see the little things they’re doing right and if the new teacher can’t see then it can be difficult – they want to change the world and they feel like it’s their path in life, but there are behavior issues and they don’t know what to do with the curriculum, they could feel like they’re going nowhere. They’ll feel like a personal failure. On the other hand, the right person could meet with them, come into their classroom, observe and say, “wow, there were 25 things that were awesome and here are some things that we can work on” That could really boost someone.

This feedback and discussion about one’s pedagogy is important in encouraging and motivating any teacher, but early career teachers in particular, when they may not yet have the skills or experience to understand and see their successes.

In an informal mentoring relationship, the mentor and the early career teacher already have an established relationship–one of ease and familiarity (Tillman, 2000). These relationships described by the participants were informal in nature, and were organically formed. The informal mentoring roles were not structured by the teachers’ schools or the DOE, but grew out of their own relationships with their colleagues. Because of the organic and informal nature of these relationships, teachers felt very comfortable with each other, and did not feel evaluated or judged. One veteran secondary teacher suggested,

*If teachers had a place to go and talk to someone, it would be good. It would help because it's non-judgmental, and ... a sounding board. Something non-evaluative.*

*Coaches and assistant principals are there for a purpose and evaluate us.*

Another teacher shared, “It's easy to get overwhelmed, but when we hear what's happening with other teachers helps everyone and I also feel like I'm not alone.” This seemed to be the most positive outcome of the informal mentoring support the teachers received. The emotional support, feeling that they were understood and that they were not alone was very important to the teachers. Coburn (2001), asserts that “informal networks among teachers are largely unacknowledged by the policy world. Yet they have enormous potential to play an influential role in teacher sensemaking” (p. 163).
Other Factors.

Inadequate salary, paperwork, and large class sizes were factors that were identified in the literature that affected teacher attrition. In the case of this research, these factors were mentioned infrequently, but did emerge in the discussions by teachers. Two elementary teachers and one secondary teacher identified inadequate salary as a factor that they felt was a challenge to their retention. They felt that they were not compensated enough for the work that they did, and two of them did mention that they thought teacher incentives would help teachers feel appreciated and sufficiently compensated. Paperwork was another factor that was minimally discussed, but identified by three teachers as having an effect on job satisfaction. These elementary and secondary teachers shared that the time spent on their DOE teacher evaluation system and on such tasks as their attendance record keeping took valuable time away from their “real” work with their students. Class size was also mentioned by all three secondary teachers and one elementary teacher as a factor that affected their work in their schools. They felt that smaller class sizes would better meet the needs of their students and be more manageable for instruction. In this particular study, these three factors did not emerge as significant factors overall, but were brought up by a few.

Facilities and resources.

The issue of facilities did not emerge at all during any of the interviews. None of the teachers mentioned their facilities as a factor that challenged them in their work. However, one teacher did mention the lack of available resources. She shared that she had only just received an ELMO projector, and due to not having enough student books, she and another teacher re-typed an entire literature book into a document online so that students had access to the reading. This was a frustration for the teacher, as it took time away from planning and other classroom preparation. However, she was willing to do this to give access to the resource to her students.

TFA, mainland recruits, and new teachers.

As shared in the results, the topic of TFA teachers, mainland recruits, and new teachers, emerged from the interviews. The discussion surrounded the nature of the relationships students had with TFA and other mainland recruits, or new teachers to their school. This discussion mainly occurred with the secondary teachers as their students seemed more adept in observing the personnel conditions at their schools.
The consensus by the secondary teachers was that the attrition rate at their schools was higher than normal, and the observations were that the new teachers, mainland recruits, and TFA teachers tended to leave the positions at their schools sooner than others. In Donaldson and Johnson’s 2011 study on TFA teacher retention, they found that 60.5% of TFA teachers taught longer than their two-year commitment within the public schools. However, over half of them (56.4%) leave their placements in high needs schools after two years. 14.8% remain teaching in their high needs schools five years after their initial hiring. The researchers state, “This level of turnover is very problematic from the perspective of low-income schools and their students” (p. 49). This echoes the sentiment of the veteran secondary teacher who shared his feelings about the TFA program’s hiring practices, “…[they hire] teacher mercenaries who make things worse by leaving after a couple of years.”

Heilig and Jez (2010), in their review of the literature on TFA, concluded that both TFA and non-TFA teachers become more effective after their second year of teaching. Because of this, they suggested creating paths for teachers to remain in the profession for longer than two years. Another conclusion from their review of the research was that the two-year commitment by TFA teachers “validates the conception of teaching not as a profession but a short-term stopover before graduate school or employment in the ‘real world’” (p. 9). This de-values the profession and its career teachers.

The concern shared by the teachers was that students lacked trust, warranted or not, in these teachers and therefore did not choose to engage in positive relationships with them. That was also apparent in the discussions about the relationships between these teacher groups and veteran teachers at the secondary schools. The lack of trust and the lack of effort on the part of the students and the veteran teachers to establish positive relationships with these personnel groups, led to an increase in the negative climate of the school. One wonders if the attrition of the new teachers, mainland recruits and the TFA teachers, was partially a result of the lack of effort in developing positive relationships with the teachers. When situations such as these arose, the climate of the school was affected. The lack of social support to the new teachers could have affected their job commitment and satisfaction, leading them to leave the school or the profession soon after employment.

Donaldson and Johnson’s (2011) study found that of the TFA teachers who left the profession, 18% of them left for school-based reasons or workplace conditions. The 18% named
administrative leadership, lack of collaboration, student discipline, and general dissatisfaction as reasons. These teachers left teaching for some of the same reasons that career teachers tend to leave the profession as well. In these cases, had there been better workplace conditions, maybe the teachers would have remained in their schools or in the profession.

Programs like TFA, that maintain they increase student achievement in the schools, and help to address the teacher shortage, have good intentions. However, due to the structure of the programs, such as the short two-year contract for teachers, they may be harming schools in ways they may not be aware. Students and teachers are also reacting to the teachers of the programs, which could be affecting the program teachers’ retention in their schools as well.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Two frameworks were used in this study. They were Higgins’ Ethics of Teaching, and Price’s Causal Model of Turnover. The Ethics of Teaching’s main focus is on the reasons that teachers teach, and what they receive from the act of teaching. At its core is the notion of fulfillment for the teacher, and “how tending to the growth of others nourishes the teacher’s own growth” (Higgins, 2003, p. 135). Price’s Causal Model, on the other hand, focuses on 12 factors that affect attrition. However, within the model, Price also offers variables that negatively affect attrition: organizational commitment, intent to stay, job satisfaction, and search behavior. Organizational commitment, and job satisfaction affects one’s intent to stay within an organization and for the purposes of this study, these were used as ways to understand the reasons the teacher participants remained in their schools. The two frameworks complemented each other in that Higgins’ view focused on the social context of the reasons for retention in the field, and Price’s model focused on satisfaction and commitment to the organization and workplace, two different pieces of the employment puzzle. Table 3 outlines the themes found in the data and both theoretical frameworks.

Table 3. Themes and Theoretical Framework Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making a Difference</th>
<th>Ethics of Teaching</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factors: Distributive Justice &amp; Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Ethics of Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factor: Distributive Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support &amp; Relationships</td>
<td>Factor: Social Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Factors: Social Support &amp; Distributive Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective &amp; Community Understanding</td>
<td>Factor: Positive/Negative Affectivity</td>
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</table>
Price’s Causal Model of Turnover.

As shared in the discussion, teachers’ organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and thus, their intent to stay were a result of a variety of factors. All teachers’ commitment to their schools and to teaching, and their satisfaction within their classrooms and schools, affected the extent of their intentions to stay in their schools. The factors that emerged from the study that had an effect on teacher retention were: social support, distributive justice, autonomy, and positive and negative affectivity. Social support emerged in the themes of support and relationships with colleagues, administration, and mentoring pre-service teachers. There are three types of social support: peer, kinship, and supervisory. In this study, peer and supervisory social support was identified. Teachers’ support by their fellow teachers and colleagues, as well as their administrators were factors in keeping them in their schools.

Distributive justice, or the punishment and rewards related to one’s job performance, was another factor that emerged that supported job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The teachers’ rewards, whether they were acknowledgements from their students, families, administrators, or employer had an effect on their job satisfaction and commitment to their schools, their employer. The distributive justice reward of making a difference and the satisfaction of the teachers’ work with students was clearly evident in the data.

Autonomy, or the employee’s opportunity and ability to exercise power over their job, was also a factor in teacher retention. The teacher participants identified their leadership opportunities and ownership of programs, projects, and initiatives as reasons they remained at their schools. The sense of autonomy they had influenced their job satisfaction and commitment to their schools.

Positive and negative affectivity were also factors that influenced teachers’ job satisfaction. The theme of teacher perspective and community understanding revealed particular ways in which the teachers viewed their students, families, and the community in which they worked. Due to the issues of poverty and the challenges of the community, the perspective and belief of the teachers affected their interactions with their students and in their work with them. The teachers with positive affectivity, or those with the tendency to have a positive emotional state, or perspective, were more satisfied in their work and relationships with their students as they identified the positive features and characteristics of their students and their families. Dauksas and White (2010) note that “Teachers with positive outlooks believe students can learn
and are more likely to remain in their teaching positions” (p. 31). The early career teacher who had difficulty relating to her students and understanding the community had a negative view, or deficit view of her students—reflecting negative affectivity. This negative perspective affected her job satisfaction and her desire to teach a different population of students.

Although the Causal Model was focused on attrition, the opposite of what the intent of this study was, it did provide a lens to analyze the data on teacher retention. Four of the 12 causal factors used in determining reasons for attrition were found within this study. The remaining eight factors either did not emerge from the data, or there was not enough significant evidence that would consider the factors to have a significant effect on teacher retention in this study. In hindsight, this model was probably not the most effective tool to analyze the data. However, it did pinpoint specific factors that affected teachers’ decisions to remain in their schools. This information is useful in discussing future implications.

**Higgins’ Ethics of Teaching.**

As discussed in the previous discussion section on making a difference, Higgins’ perspective and belief in the Ethics of Teaching was apparent in the teachers’ understanding that they had made a difference in the lives of their students. This factor was critical in their decisions to remain teaching at their schools. The sense of fulfillment, and that they had done something productive sustained the teachers’ motivation to teach. Higgins is clear in his belief that teachers need, and rightfully should, be selfish in knowing and understanding what sustains and motivates them in their work. If teachers remain self-less, burnout is sure to occur. When teachers receive satisfaction from their work and pay attention to their needs and desires, such as in projects and programs that they are passionate about, they re-fuel themselves and keep themselves going. The teachers in this study were aware of what they received from their work with their students. They knew that the acknowledgement from students, families, and administration was important to them. They were all passionate about their daily work, as well as about special projects, programs, or initiatives that they started, maintained or worked on. This helped to motivate them in their work, as they received something they needed from it—fulfilling their own needs through their passions or what satisfied them personally.

Although a factor in teacher attrition, the issue of teacher burnout did not emerge from the interviews with teachers. Higgins argues,
It is certainly not difficult to find teachers who, while making a substantial difference in their students’ lives, will readily admit that they have more or less ceased having much of a life themselves. The first point that needs to be made is that, even if this constitutes a description of good teaching, it is not a description of sustainable teaching. The problem of “teacher burnout” is well documented, and there are no doubt many factors that make teaching a difficult activity to sustain for long. (2003, p. 148)

The teachers in this study did not describe themselves as being burnt out or were ready to quit. The veteran teachers, who had been teaching for more than 20 years shared that they were still passionate about their students and their work. They all identified a purpose for their teaching and that they continued to sustain goals for themselves–either work with their students, curriculum innovations, or programs they hoped to continue. These passions were vital in sustaining their desire to work in their schools. To combat burnout and attrition, Higgins contends,

> Our best teachers propel their practice on the fast-burning fuel of a discerning and loving altruism only to find their tanks mysteriously empty long before they care ready to give up the fight. Moral concerns, while crucial in navigating certain dilemmas and interactions, cannot guide a life’s pursuit. At some point, our projects must tap into our desires and aspirations. In other words, they must be our projects (2003, p. 149).

Not only did the teachers serve their students, the community and school by teaching, they also served themselves by fulfilling their passions and getting satisfaction from their jobs.

Higgins believes that teachers often subscribe to Nietzsche’s “ascetic ideal”, referring to the ways people pride themselves in the sacrifices they make. Although teachers believe the profession to be self-less and encompassing many acts of sacrifice, the recognition or acknowledgement teachers receive are overlooked, but is their ethic.

Acknowledgement was important to the teacher participants and an important part of fulfilling the teachers and motivating them to continue to teach. “If teachers cannot find some way to make teaching for themselves while also doing justice to the moral demands of the job, their teaching itself will suffer” (Higgins, 2003, p. 146). The Ethics of Teaching provided a lens in which to look at the teacher participants’ motivation and desire to continue teaching—what acknowledgement and benefit they received from their work.
Implications and Suggestions for Practice

This study’s results have implications for four stakeholder groups: Hawai‘i State Department of Education administrators, school level administrators, university pre-service teacher preparation programs, and teachers.

Administrators.

For the purposes of this section, administrators will be identified in two ways: 1) those administrators outside of and considered at a higher capacity than those at the school level, such as educational officers, superintendents, and those others who make decisions for schools within the DOE system; and 2) administrators within the school setting, such as principals and assistant principals.

Department of Education administrators.

As a result of this research, I propose two suggestions for DOE administrators that would influence teacher job satisfaction, job commitment, and teacher retention: recruitment and hiring practices, and acknowledgement of teachers.

Recruitment and hiring.

Seven of the 10 teacher participants in this study were committed to the schools they taught in had previous connections to the community or had previously established relationships with students in the community. Five of the seven teachers sought positions at their schools because of these connections and relationships. Because of this, the teachers were more than aware of the challenges of the community and the needs of the students before they were hired. This situation was beneficial for the teachers, students, and school. The teachers understood the challenges they would face, while at the same time saw the positive characteristics of the people and the community. Knowing this, the DOE should recruit teachers with connections to Title I schools and their communities. Being able to be work in the schools already aware of and having interacted with the population is important to the success of the teacher and the students. In other ways, adopting and investing in homegrown, or grow your own models of teacher recruitment and teacher preparation is an avenue in which to accomplish this. Grow your own models of teacher recruitment strive to recruit and train potential teachers from the communities in which there is a hiring need. There are programs across the nation using this model (Kawakami, Keahiolalo-Karasuda, Carroll, & King, 2011). Over time, it would make sense that those either
choosing to teach in a specific community, having connections to the community, or having been a part of the community are beneficial ways to recruit educators for specific locales.

In relation to recruitment and hiring practices, the findings about the observed and experienced consequences of TFA and mainland recruits in the schools in the study also have implications for the DOE. The retention numbers for TFA, and programs like it, are not stellar. As well, neither are the retention numbers for “our own” teachers from Hawai‘i. However, given the discussion on the effects of mainland recruits and TFA teachers on student motivation and relationships, I would caution the DOE in continuing to utilize these types of programs to staff schools. The emotional consequences of the relationships between TFA and mainland recruited teachers and students, and relationships between TFA and mainland recruited teachers and other teachers contributed to a negative workplace environment for all involved. Students and local resident teachers did not put effort into, and, at times were the instigators of a negative relationship with TFA and mainland recruited teachers. If the utilization of these programs continues I urge the DOE to encourage schools to put structures in place to encourage, support, and sustain positive relationships between all parties. The negative experiences with and assumptions about the TFA teachers and mainland recruits, warranted or not, led to a negative climate for the school.

Acknowledgement.

The issue of acknowledgement emerged in the results and has implications for the DOE. The DOE was identified as being the least of all stakeholders to acknowledge their teachers well. Pens, certificates, and pins, for 20 or 30 years of service seemed trivial to the teachers. The DOE needs to demonstrate that they value their teachers. It is easy for morale to dwindle without acknowledgement. When asked what might be suggestions that would be valued acknowledgement from their employer, teachers mentioned monetary bonuses or incentives for years of service, better working conditions, such as air conditioning in classrooms so teachers and students could work productively; and supplies and equipment for their classrooms. Some of these suggestions did not sound like incentives, but needs. However, given the working conditions of the teachers, where they sometimes lacked basic equipment like document cameras, and resources like class book sets, these suggestions would be considered acknowledgement, and would be gestures that showed the DOE valued their teachers. The teachers felt that having to “beg” for salary increases through their union did not seem fair and illustrated how devalued
they were as a profession. In whatever ways possible, the DOE needs to acknowledge their teachers appropriately for the work, effort, and years of service that have been invested.

**School level administrators.**

There are four suggestions for school level administrators that would influence teacher retention in their schools. I propose the following: 1) developing and maintaining a positive school climate, 2) providing and supporting leadership opportunities for teachers, 3) being a servant leader, and 4) considering hiring of community members, or encouraging their pathways to education so that there are more teachers hired with previous connections to the school.

**Positive school climate.**

It is imperative for school level administrators to create a positive work environment and climate in their schools. Administrators need to find ways to build relationships with individual teachers and staff, as well as build a sense of community between teachers as well. As part of building a positive work environment, acknowledgement and appreciation of the efforts and accomplishments are vital, as well as believing and practicing the philosophy of the servant leader. In these ways, teachers and staff feel honored, appreciated and acknowledged for their work and for who they are as part of the culture of the school.

To encourage a positive school climate, it would be important for administrators to earnestly acknowledge the accomplishments and work of the teachers in their schools. Teachers often do not need grandiose expressions of appreciation, as one veteran teacher shared, “For teachers, one compliment will go a thousand days.” Seemingly small gestures are appreciated by teachers and are a demonstration of caring by the person sharing the gesture. Just as our students are very aware of a teacher’s sincerity and caring, teachers also know when acknowledgements are heartfelt, and administrators should take caution to be earnest and sincere when sharing them.

When I was a classroom teacher, I used to write out slips of “I caught you doing something good” papers for five of my students every day. Each day, I would choose another five students to “catch.” By the end of the week, I had written at least one note to each of my students. The students would share their notes with their parents if they chose to. I put this structure in place so that I knew systematically that I acknowledged my students at least once, formally, during the week. It helped to create a positive environment, and the students wanted to “get caught,” and so the mere act of noticing positive attributes or actions of students, and writing a small note to them helped them to want to feel valued, appreciated, and also made them
want to do better in the classroom. They knew that I had witnessed something they did and was appreciated for it. Although an extrinsic reward, it satisfied them knowing their behaviors, work, or efforts were noticed. This is not to say that principals should write out memos to teachers, but these small acts of acknowledgement, and pats on the back after a long day, would sustain teachers and keep them motivated. However, principals need to find those strategies and systems that would work for them, in order to be consistent, conscientious, and earnest about acknowledging teachers and staff.

Administrators should also be supportive in developing and helping teachers maintain positive relationships with each other. In creating a positive school climate, the principal’s guidance and support of the faculty relationships is important. There needs to be a sense that everyone is working toward common goals, a common vision, and is on the same team. Teachers mentioned that having these clear goals and expectations, set by their administrator, helped them have a sense of cohesiveness within the school. “Teachers’ collegial interactions are made possible by a principal who encourages them to work together, ensures that they have time to do so, and brokers their relationships” (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 6).

Leadership opportunities and trust.

Another way in which administrators would encourage retention in their schools is to offer more opportunities for teachers to have ownership in their work. Providing opportunities for teachers to work on curriculum, projects and programs that they are passionate about, and starting initiatives that would help the vision of the school and student progress would lead to more teacher engagement in their work environment, and lead to greater job satisfaction and commitment. The teachers in this study mentioned the word “trust” when discussing their administrators—whether the principals lacked trust in them or had trust in them was important to the teachers. The teachers felt that they were trusted when proposals for projects or initiatives were approved, or when they had more control over their curriculum in their classrooms. Administrator trust is an important factor in teachers’ motivation and job satisfaction.

The servant leader.

Administrators should consider embracing and practicing the role of the servant leader. When the perspective of the administrator shifts to the practice that she/he is serving their schools, students, teachers, and staff, it encourages a different dynamic from that of the traditional authoritative administrator. Viewing and treating others within the school as clients or
customers helps to create a positive school climate. The administrator would be more conscious of supporting, serving, and helping the teachers and staff with the goal of servicing the students. This mindset would serve principals well, in relating better with their stakeholders. Hughes (2012) suggests “helping administrators understand their level of influence and guiding them toward building a positive working relationship with teachers, and empowering teachers would enhance teacher retention” (p. 247).

**Recruitment and hiring.**

Another way in which administrators could affect retention in their schools is through recruitment using the previously mentioned grow your own model. Recruitment of teachers that have connections to the community or have previous experience working with its students or families. As suggested for the DOE administrators, this recruitment strategy would enhance retention, as teachers would already understand the students or the workings of the community before hiring. This knowledge is critical in working in Title I schools and with populations of students in poverty.

As well, if TFA teachers or mainland recruits continue to be hired by schools, I again suggest the same for school level administrators—that they encourage and support positive relationships between local resident teachers and others. As one teacher shared, “If we can build the relationships between the mainland teachers and the local teachers and build their friendships, that's another goal right there.” It is a need and if addressed and promoted, would help teacher retention for all parties.

**University pre-service teacher preparation programs.**

The results of this study have implications for university pre-service teacher preparation programs. Teacher education programs could implement three practices that would have a positive impact on teacher retention in high needs Title I schools: educating pre-service teachers about poverty, rejecting the deficit view, and teaching Equity Literacy; placing pre-service teachers in a variety of field placements in different communities; and faculty mentoring post graduation.

Understanding the issues of poverty and the effects of poverty on individuals, schools, communities, and the larger society is important for teachers of any community. The understandings that pre-service teachers have about students in poverty may hurt or help their work in the schools. As noted in the discussion and results, the teachers who had an
understanding and awareness about the challenges of those in poverty had a better experience working with their students. They had less of a tension between their objectives for their students and the realities of their work. Teacher educators should weave this understanding, perspective, and curriculum of Equity Literacy into their coursework and particularly in discussions with teacher candidates about their experiences in the field.

Aligned with this perspective is the practice of placing pre-service teachers in field placements in varied communities. University professors and instructors normally have partnerships with particular schools. If pre-service teachers are only given the opportunity to experience one school, or one type of student demographic, the scope of their pedagogical experience is limited. Morgan and Kritsonis (2008), propose universities

...expose pre-service teachers to not only the high-performing, exemplary schools, but to low socioeconomic schools as well. Too often, college graduates become disenchanted with the public school system when their first teaching assignment bears no resemblance to their student teaching experience. New teachers need a more accurate depiction of hard-to-staff schools, so they will know the challenges that await them (and be willing to face them anyway). (p. 3)

The field experience is a critical part of teacher preparation programs across the nation. In order to better prepare our pre-service teachers for a variety of work environments, we must give them an array of opportunities to work with different student populations. Nieto (2003), shares this, “Unless we prepare new teachers with the kinds of experiences that equip them to go into diverse urban schools with both level-headedness and hope, the situation will remain the same” (p. 125).

The situation she refers to is teacher attrition. In order to accomplish this goal, university faculty need to start conversations about supporting each other’s pre-service teachers so that they can experience and learn to teach a wider array of students.

Lastly, university programs should encourage faculty mentoring of graduates. As is being done through Dean Young’s SONG initiative at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, support for graduates is another factor that can positively influence teacher retention. Tillman (2000) recognizes and identifies faculty mentoring as a benefit to early career teachers. Universities should encourage and support faculty mentoring of their graduates, particularly in cases where faculty is able to continue relationships in which the students have already established relationships. “The informal mentoring relationship capitalizes on an existing natural relationship between the novice educator and the faculty member. Because both parties willingly enter into
the relationship, there is the likelihood that trust and mutual respect already exist” (Tillman, 2000, p. 25). As well, the faculty member is not a member of the school community in which the teacher works so the teacher may be more inclined to share his/her frustrations and challenges with him/her.

A benefit for the university in mentoring graduates is the “Opportunity for faculty mentors to reflect upon the effectiveness of their teacher preparation program. …we gain insights regarding specific strengths and needs of beginning teachers. This feedback affords us opportunities to reflect about where we need to improve and to address these areas or concern as we revise our programs” (Tillman, 2000, p. 26). This information is informative and a means to reflect upon what is working or not within our teacher preparation programs.

Universities could do more to encourage and support teacher retention, particularly in high needs Title I schools through the aforementioned practices.

**Teachers.**

The study’s findings have implications for teachers within these high needs Title I schools. Teachers should take on leadership roles as the opportunities arise, be reflective and maintain positive views of their work, seek out trustworthy and supportive peers, and make efforts to understand the people and the communities of their schools.

**Leadership.**

Both early career and veteran teachers need to find their passion, and take on projects or initiatives at their schools that they can be involved with to be a part of a positive movement in their schools. The teachers who took on leadership roles or saw themselves as being a part of the positive change in their schools felt deep job satisfaction and job commitment. They knew they were affecting change at their schools and were an integral part of something positive. If teachers have the opportunity to do so, taking on these roles or responsibilities would increase their satisfaction in and commitment to their work.

**Positive affectivity.**

Another factor that positively influenced teachers’ job satisfaction in this study was their positive affectivity. Their ability to see the positive in their work and in their students was critical in keeping them motivated. Although this may be a personal characteristic, it is critical for teachers to be able to step back and reflect. Reflecting on challenging areas is necessary in the profession—it helps teachers to formatively assess themselves and what changes can be made
to improve their practice and the progress of their students. However, it is also important to reflect on one’s successes. Without this skill, teachers begin to feel alone and defeated. One early career teacher identified her positivity as one of her best traits, and shared that it helped her to get through her tough times. She said that she would ask herself when she felt she was becoming negative, “How can I activate my positivity every day?” It helped her to consciously focus on the positive, and it has helped her immensely in her work. She said it helps her see the things to be grateful for and helps her focus on the positives rather than dwell on the negatives.

One veteran teacher remembered his early career days and said that they were difficult because he was not able to see what he was doing right in his classroom. Being able to step back and identify successes and practice positive affectivity is important to keep early career teachers motivated. Encouraging positive thinking, while being realistic about one’s teaching circumstances is key to increased job satisfaction.

   Early career teachers.

All teacher participants shared that they appreciated, valued, and needed support from fellow colleagues at their schools. These relationships helped them through their most challenging times, and were an avenue to feel less alone in their jobs, and a way to know that others are experiencing similar circumstances. One suggestion for early career teachers is to seek out support from other people surrounding them in their schools. If they are assigned a mentor by the school or the DOE, they should still seek out informal support. Tillman (2000), describes a “mentor mosaic,” where mentoring happens in a variety of forms, and that a “network of secondary mentors can fill the gaps that might exist within more formal mentoring programs, increasing the likelihood that their combined efforts will meet more fully the developmental needs of novice educators” (p. 25). It is important, though, to seek someone that is trustworthy and someone that the teacher already respects. It is difficult to establish or receive social support from someone that one does not have a trusting and comfortable relationship with. Early career teachers should build a network of other teachers for support. Most likely, these teachers would be from the same school, but it does not necessarily have to be. With technology–online professional learning communities (PLCs), groups of teachers with similar concerns, interests, or challenges are easily connected and can be a source of support and mentoring.
Veteran teachers.

There is a strong need for early career teachers to be mentored and supported in schools. According to the data, the most desired teacher supports came from the teachers’ relationships with other teachers. I encourage veteran teachers to become more involved with the mentoring of early career teachers. Establishing positive relationships with all teachers, whether early career, mainland recruits, or TFA, will help teacher retention for all teacher groups.

Veteran teachers must realize how much support they can offer other, early career teachers. Experienced teachers have a bank of expertise and knowledge, and could contribute much to the climate and community of a school. Mentoring and supporting early career teachers in the seemingly little things helps a great deal. Helping to acclimate early career teachers into the culture of the school is critical. Often, we hear about teachers who struggle in their first year as a result of just trying to figure out basic information like where the bathrooms are, how to handle a student who needs to go to the health room, what the procedures are for attendance and sending in the lunch count, how to work the copy machine, and how to purchase their lunch. When teachers have someone they can turn to for these day-to-day questions, it helps alleviate their sense of being lost or alone in a new school. Veteran teachers also have much to share and advise early career teachers on with curriculum, instruction, classroom management, and assessment. It is always helpful to get advice from others who have more experience in these areas and can share their perspectives and tips and tricks, and particularly in working with the specific student population of the school.

As shared in the results, the teachers who mentored pre-service teachers identified ways in which they, themselves, benefited from the relationship and experience. As Zey (1984) asserts, the mentoring relationship is mutually beneficial.

The veteran teachers in the study also found support years into their careers, through the supportive relationships they had with their peers. Continuing these relationships and extending out to other relationships would benefit veteran teachers as well as those being mentored or supported.

Rejecting the deficit view.

Another implication for teachers, both veteran and early career, is that they need to seek to understand the community in which they are teaching. Whether the population is of high or low SES, understanding the workings of the community and understanding the families of their
students is critical. The majority of the teachers shared what they knew and perceived about their students, their families, and the community of their schools. The rejection of the deficit view of poverty was evident in their interviews, and it was a factor that helped them to work more flexibly and empathetically with their students.

In the interviews, teachers shared their suggestions on how to better understand the community. Some of the suggestions were: carve time out to build relationships with and speak to parents and family members as often as possible—in the morning or after school when students are picked up or dropped off, volunteer in the community especially when first hired at the school, talk to other teachers who know the families and find out how they successfully work with their students and interact with parents and family members. One veteran teacher shared her thoughts that although a teacher’s experience could be very different from the community in which they work, “don’t judge, but try to understand”. The teacher felt that when judgment is involved, it was far harder to work with the students.

I urge teachers to educate themselves on poverty and what can be done in classrooms to support students and families in their schools.

**An unexpected outcome.**

An unexpected result occurred after the data collection phase of this study was complete. The early career secondary teacher emailed me and shared this very exciting news,

_Aloha Stephanie,_

_Wanted to thank you very much. Our discussions have given me a lot to think and reflect on.

From our discussions, I have requested to take on two initiatives: (1) mentoring all new teacher (first and second year) to ease transition into working at [school] in hopes to increase teacher retention beyond two years, and (2) observe/research the various protocol/accountability systems and policies (e.g. security, tardy policy, custodial staff) on campus and make suggestions on how to make the systems more efficient.

It is a lot and with the teachers’ support, I am hoping for the best. However, if it does not work, then I rather be a jaded teacher that tried than one that did not. Haha.

Great talks,

Mahalo for the opportunity! (personal communication, March 30, 2015)
This teacher, who had already taken on a leadership role at his school—as his team lead and in other ways in working with administration on multiple initiatives, chose to take on more responsibilities as he felt they were needed and were important. This decision to do this for other early career teachers, and to be more involved in organizational structures for his school illustrated his vested interest in the school and his students. During his interviews he constantly referred to the preparation and success of his students as his ultimate professional goal. These initiatives that he decided to take on would positively impact the teachers and students at his school. In a follow up email, he shared his progress,

_I got the okay from [principal] to work on my initiatives. Next year, I have partial supervision over all first and second years. My goal is not only acclimate them to [community], but have them help improve the academic culture at the school. Additionally, I have started two committees. One committee is to decrease student tardiness through proactive and reactive procedures and the other committee is to ensure that security faculty has a weekly protocol and support from administration._

_I have a few more committees that I would like to work on. But one step at a time, and I’ve got to make sure that I do these well if I am to gain respect from the faculty._

(personal communication, May 3, 2015)

The teacher was very aware of the need for buy-in from the faculty in order to even more work at the school. The empowerment he felt in discussing the challenges he and his school faced, and the communication exchanged between he and the other secondary teachers at his school during the focus group was a catalyst for him to effect more change at his school.

This was a powerful example of the impact discussion alone can have for teachers and schools. The discussions between he and I, and with the focus group, led to more action by the teacher in regards to concerns he had as a member of his school community. I hope that this school is on its way to creating a positive school climate, where students are the beneficiaries. In referencing Danielson (2006), this teacher, his principal and school are closer to a collaborative school culture. I strongly encourage schools, administrators, and teachers to be open and willing to have deep conversations about the challenges of their schools, which may open doors to positive change.
Limitations of the Study

The greatest limitation of this study was that the number of participating schools and the participant population was very small. The schools were limited by their geographic area—limited by their location in one community, as well as the schools’ Title I designation. Due to these factors, the results cannot be generalized to other locations or Title I schools. The data gathered was specific to this community and these schools.

Suggestions for Future Research

Reflecting on this study and its outcomes, there are a few suggestions for future research. Following up with the early career teacher who was within the first three years of employment to see where she is, what her experience has been, and if she still has the same feelings about the community in which she was working. I challenge those studying in the field to conduct more case studies on early career teachers who choose to leave high needs Title I schools to understand more deeply the reasons they leave. At the surface level, factors such as workplace cohesion, geography, and excessive paperwork might be named, but there may be other underlying factors that affect these teachers’ decisions to leave their positions—whether they are personal characteristics of the teachers, or the tension about the beliefs they have of the population they are working with. In-depth, qualitative explorations of teacher attrition may help us to better understand teacher attrition at a deeper level.

Personally, I hope to follow up with the secondary teacher who began initiatives at his school to improve teacher retention and formalize procedures and protocols that would help the school run more smoothly. It would be informative to follow his experience and see what challenges arise for him, what successes he has, and what changes are implemented, sustained, and to what effect. The understanding of this teacher’s experience would be helpful to other schools hoping to improve teacher retention and their school organization.

Future research should also be conducted on support programs such as UH-Mānoa’s SONG initiative. The support provided to teacher education graduates is a critical component in retaining teachers. Gathering data on SONG program components, and their effects on teacher retention, would be important information that could enhance teacher retention.

This study was limited in scope, so I also encourage more qualitative research done on teacher retention in high needs schools to understand if the struggles, challenges, and successes are similar across Title I schools in different communities.
Overall Significance of Study

In one specific case, this study on teacher retention significantly influenced one of its participants. One teacher, who found value in the discussions about the challenges he experienced, felt compelled to take action on them. If only one, this study had a real-world effect for this one teacher and hopefully his school. This study’s results and findings were not at all surprising. It did shed light on the differences between causes for attrition and causes for retention. It seemed that some of the same factors found in the literature on teacher attrition influenced teacher retention in this study. However, reasons for retention, such as relationships, making a difference, and teacher perception were all set within the social context of school. The most influential factors in teacher retention for these teachers in these three Title I schools were mainly intrinsic. Thus, the overall significance of this study was in the confirmation that many of the factors that influence attrition in schools were similar to these teachers’ experiences in their Title I schools. Factors such as administrator support and leadership, and making a difference confirmed the current research on teacher attrition and retention. However, the understanding of the influence that relationships had on the teachers as a factor in their retention was a significant finding. Positive school climates and relationships were at the foundation of teacher retention in this study. Teacher retention remains a challenge for high needs Title I schools. This study brought to light the importance of relationships within the context of the school, teachers’ perspectives about students and communities in poverty, and their influence on teacher retention. This research supports Johnson et al’s 2012 study findings,

We conclude that a range of working conditions matter to teachers, but the most important—those that both help retain teachers in low-income, high-minority schools and make it possible for their students to achieve are the ones that shape the social context of teaching and learning (p. 6).
References


University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa College of Education (n.d.). *College of Education supports new teachers*. [Brochure]. Honolulu, Hawai‘i: SONG


Appendix A: Consent Form

Teacher Consent to Participate in Research Project:
A Case Study of Teacher Retention in Three Title I Hawaiʻi Schools

My name is Stephanie Furuta, a current PhD student in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. The purpose of my dissertation research is to explore and understand why early career and veteran teachers who teach in the [school] Complex decide to remain and continue to teach there. Research has shown that there is a correlation between teacher retention and student achievement. If we understand why teachers willingly remain teaching in these settings, we may be able to increase teacher retention and thus have a positive impact on student achievement. I am asking you to participate in this project because you are a teacher with 3 or more years of experience and employed in the [school] Complex.

Project Description – Activities and Time Commitment: If you choose to participate, I will interview you once to find out your views, teaching experiences, and why you choose to teach in [school]. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. You will then participate in a 60 – 90 minute focus group on a different day where you would share your thoughts and answer questions with other teachers from [school]. I will record both the interview and the focus group discussion using a digital audio-recorder. I am recording the interview so I can later type a transcript – a written record of what we talked about during the interview – and analyze the information from the interview. If you participate, you will be one of a total of 15 teachers who I will interview individually. One example of the type of question I will ask is, “What do you find enjoyable about your job?” During the interview, I will also be asking you to complete a short, 5 minute demographic survey, and bring an artifact with you that you feel represents your teaching career. I will ask you to talk about the artifact and how it is connected to your teaching career. I will photograph your artifact for documentation purposes. If you would like to preview a copy of all of the questions that I will ask you, please let me know in advance.

Benefits and Risks: There is no direct benefit to you in participating in this research. You may benefit in using the study as a platform to share your feelings and experiences about teaching in [school]. The results of this project might help me and other researchers learn more about teachers’ desire to teach in communities such as [school]. Due to the small number of schools (2) and teachers (15) participating in this study, there is a risk of loss of privacy. We can meet to interview anywhere that is convenient for you. If you are uncomfortable or stressed by answering any of the interview questions, I will skip the question, take a break, stop the interview, or you may withdraw from the project altogether. All you need to do to withdraw is to let me know in any form (verbally or in writing).

Confidentiality and Privacy: During this research project, I will keep all data from the interview sessions in a secure location. Only I will have access to the data, although legally authorized agencies, including the University of Hawaiʻi Committee on Human Studies, have the right to review research records.

After I transcribe the session recordings, I will erase the audio-recordings and the photograph of your artifact. When I report the results of my research project, and in my typed transcripts, I will
not use your name, your school’s name, or any other personally identifying information. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your name. A report of my findings will be shared with your school, with the public through presentations, including my dissertation committee at my dissertation defense, and may also be shared at conferences or in journals or other publications. If you would like a summary of the findings from my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

Voluntary Participation and Compensation for Your Time: Participation in this research project is voluntary. You can choose freely to participate or not to participate. In addition, at any point during this project, you can withdraw your permission without any penalty of loss of benefits. To thank you for your time, I will send you a $20.00 gift card of your choice to CVS, Starbucks, or Amazon for simply returning this form.

Questions: If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at via phone at (808)384-7408, or e-mail at furutas@Hawai‘i.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, in this project, you can contact the University of Hawai‘i, Committee on Human Studies (CHS), by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at uhirb@Hawai‘i.edu.

Please keep the prior portion of this consent form for your records.
If you agree to participate in this project, please sign the following signature portion of this consent form and return it in the self-addressed envelope to:
Stephanie Furuta
1776 University Avenue, Everly 223
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96822
Teacher Consent to Participate in Research Project:

A Case Study of Teacher Retention in Three Title I Hawai‘I Schools

☐ Yes    ☐ No  I agree to have my interviews recorded with a digital audio recorder.

Signature for Consent:

I agree to participate in the research project entitled, *A Case Study of Teacher Retention in Three Title I Hawai‘I Schools.*

Your Name (Print):  ______________________________________________

Your Signature:  ______________________________________________

Date:  ____________________________________
July 10, 2014

TO: Stephanie Furuta  
Principal Investigator  
College of Education – Institute for Teacher Education  

FROM: Denise A. Lin-DeShetler, MPH, MA  
Director

SUBJECT: CHS #22309- “A Case Study of Teacher Retention in Two Title I Hawaii Schools”

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On July 10, 2014, the University of Hawai‘i (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45CFR 46.101(b)(Exempt Category 2).

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at http://www.hawaii.edu/irb/html/manual/appendices/A/belmont.html.

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via email at uhirb@hawaii.edu. (The subject line should read: Exempt Study Modification.) The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program at 956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. We wish you success in carrying out your research project.
Appendix C: Hawaii DOE Research Approval

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

November 21, 2014

Ms. Stephanie Furuta
1776 University Avenue, Everly 223
Honolulu, HI 96822

Re: Research Application Decision

Dear Ms. Furuta:

I am pleased to approve your Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) research application for the study “A Case Study of Teacher Retention in Two Title I Hawaii Schools” (Study #201361178207), which seeks to conduct further research on teacher retention, specifically in hard-to-staff schools, to better understand the reasons why teachers choose to continue working in these settings.

This approval will expire one year from the date of this letter. If you require additional time to complete your study, you must submit a request for an extension or another application before this approval expires. Please contact the HIDOE Data Governance and Analysis Branch at DOEResearch@notes.k12.hi.us as soon as possible to confirm your next steps.

You have indicated that you will be inviting the following HIDOE schools to participate in your study:

You have also indicated that you will be inviting the following individuals at these targeted schools to participate in your study:

- 6 beginning teachers (those with three to six years of teaching experience)
- 9 mid- to late-career teachers (those with seven or more years of teaching experience)

All teachers who participate in your study will be involved in the following activities:

1. An online survey that will collect demographic and career information (e.g., age, education, employment history, career information, teaching beliefs). This activity will take approximately 20 minutes and will be conducted during non-instructional time anywhere participants have internet access.

2. A semi-structured interview to explore the factors that affect participants’ decisions to remain teaching at their schools. This activity will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be conducted during non-instructional time wherever is most convenient for the participants.

3. Sharing an educational artifact that is representative of their career or teaching experience. This activity will take approximately 10 minutes and will be a part of the 60- to 90-minute semi-structured interview.

AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER
Mid- to late-career teachers who participate in your study will also be involved in the following activity:

4. A follow-up semi-structured interview to extend the discussion on factors affecting participants' desire to remain teaching in their schools. This activity will take approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted during non-instructional time wherever is most convenient for the participants.

HIDOE will provide the following de-identified individual-level data to you for use in your study:

- Teacher retention data for school years 2003-2004 through 2014-2015 [redacted]

As you proceed with your study, please be aware of the following:

- The participation of HIDOE schools, offices, students, and personnel in your study is strictly voluntary.
- All study activities must take place at dates, times, and locations agreed upon by the administrators of the participating HIDOE schools and offices.
- Any compensation provided to HIDOE personnel for participation in your study must be for activities completed outside of instructional and work hours and must be in compliance with the Hawaii State Ethics Code. Any questions about this topic should be referred to the Hawaii State Ethics Commission.
- You are required to conduct your study in accordance with both the conditions of approval described in this letter and the document "Affirmation and Acknowledgement of the Processes, Procedures, and Conditions for Conducting Research in the Hawaii State Department of Education" (the "Affirmation Form for Researchers"), which is attached to Tab 6 of your application.
- You are responsible for ensuring that all individuals involved in this study — both those affiliated with your organization and those contracted by your organization and affiliated with external entities or vendors — adhere to all of the conditions of my approval, including those detailed in this letter and those stipulated by the Affirmation Form for Researchers.

Should you have any questions about the above, please contact Jennifer Higaki, HIDOE Data Governance and Analysis Branch, at DOEresearch@notes.k12.hi.us or (808) 440-2850.

Best wishes for a successful study. We look forward to receiving your findings and recommendations.

Very truly yours,

Kathryn S. Matayoshi
Superintendent

KSM:md
Appendix D: Teacher Survey

Teacher Retention Survey
According to the 2012 Superintendent’s 23rd Annual Report, the [area] District employed [#] classroom teachers in the 2011 – 2012 school year. Of those, only 60.4% of the teachers spent 5 or more years at the same [area] District school. This survey’s purpose is to gather demographic data, as well as preliminarily investigate the reasons that teachers, like you, choose to remain in classrooms in the [community] Complex. Exploring these reasons will help schools to support and retain their teachers and will ultimately bring more stability and increased student achievement to [community] Complex schools and possibly other [area] district schools.
Thank you for taking the time to fill this out and share your experiences.

Name: __________________________________________________________

Age: _______ Area of certification/licensure: _________________________

Education Degree received from (University/College):
________________________________________________________________

Bachelor’s Degree in __________________________ From: __________________________ (Institution)

Email address: __________________________________

Residential Zip Code: ____________________________

Employment History, from most current position:
(please use the back of this sheet if you need more room)

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Appendix E : Semi-Structured Interview Questions for All Participants

**Personal Career Path:**
How did you decide you wanted to become a teacher?
- Was there an event/incident, or person that influenced you to become a teacher?

What do you think of your decision to become a teacher?

**Pedagogy/Teaching Practice:**
What do you believe about how children learn?

What are your goals as a teacher?
What are your goals for your students?

Describe your typical classroom practice (lecture, small group instruction, project-based learning, textbook-based, etc).

What types of teaching strategies seem to work best with your students?
How do you know?

What types of teaching strategies do your students seem to enjoy the most?

What do you enjoy the most about teaching?

What do you enjoy the least about teaching?

**Recruitment/[community] Complex Employment:**
What brought you to teach at [school]?

What affects your desire to stay at [school]?

Is geography a factor in your desire to stay at [school]? Please explain.

Do you have relationships with or family connections to the [school] staff or the [community]?

According to the survey, you have been working at [school] since [date].
What successes have you had within your employment at [school]?

What do you think are your biggest challenges in your employment in [school]
What can you do/will you do to overcome these challenges?

Describe a memorable moment you have had teaching at [school].

Describe a challenging moment you have had teaching at [school].

What do you think about your students: academically, socially, emotionally?
How do you feel about your students: academically, socially, emotionally?
How would you describe your relationship to your students?

What do you think about your students’ families?
How do you feel about your students’ families?
What types of relationships do you have with your students’ families?

What do you think about the [community]?
How do you feel about the [community]?
Do you engage in community activities or events? If so, what are you involved in?
How do you see your role in the community?

Currently, how enjoyable is your job? Have your feelings changed over the course of your employment?

Artifact Sharing:
Could you describe your artifact?
How did you acquire it?
Why is [artifact] important to you?
How is this related to your career in education?
What does this [artifact] symbolize?
Are there other similar moments in your career related to this same symbol/ feeling/philosophy/belief?

Support:
When you have challenging days, whom do you seek out for support?
In what ways do they/he/she help you through your challenges?

When you have challenges with students or parents, whom do you seek out for support?
In what ways do they/he/she help you through your challenges?

What [other] supports would help you through your challenges?

Perceptions about Turnover:
Do you think your school has a higher, lower or average rate of teacher turnover than other schools? Why or why not?
Do you think teacher retention is an important issue for schools? For your school? Why/why not?

Why do you think other teachers decide to remain teaching at [school]?
What do you think that the public thinks about teachers? Why?
What do you believe the public thinks about teachers that teach in [community]?
Do these perceptions by the public help or challenge your desire to teach there?

What do you know about the teachers who continue to work at [school]?
Why do you think they continue to work at [school]?

**Suggestions:**
What suggestions would you have for the HIDOE and/or administrator(s) at your school to help teacher retention at [school]?

What suggestions would you have for the HIDOE and/or administrator(s) to help teacher retention in [community]?

**Future Plans:**
What are your career goals in the next 1 – 4 years?

What are your career goals in the next 5 – 10 years?

If teacher does not anticipate leaving the school:
According to the survey, you shared that [future plans].
What would have to happen for you to consider leaving [school]?

If the teacher anticipates leaving the school:
According to the survey, you shared that [future plans].
Why are you considering [leaving/transferring] [school]?

Any there any other thoughts you’d like to share?
Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

Elementary Focus Group Questions

Recruitment/[community] Complex Employment:
It seems that relationships with students, families and other staff members, and knowing you’ve made a difference are strong factors that keep teachers teaching in[community]. Also, support from administration and the ability to make decisions—having a voice—and feeling that your work is validated were important. What do you think about these factors? Do you feel similarly? Do these factors influence you at all to continue teaching at [school]?

Often, “not making a difference” was cited as a reason to leave the school. What does this specifically mean to you? When would you know that you weren’t making a difference? (examples: non-acknowledgement or recognition of work, student related acknowledgement)

It seems that many participants felt that classroom management and student motivation were their biggest challenges. Secondary to that were challenges with the DOE – lack of funding for programs, smaller class sizes and compliance issues like EES and paperwork. What do you think about this? Would you agree?

Acknowledgement
Teachers seem to be saying that you receive acknowledgement and satisfaction from relationships with students, families and sometimes your schools and administrators. What was mentioned a few times by interview participants was the lack of acknowledgement from the DOE, your employer. Any thought on this? What effect would acknowledgement have on your job satisfaction or performance? What kind of acknowledgement would be appreciated by the institution (DOE), administration/school?

TFA
One interesting finding was that many participants mentioned TFA and the many mainland teacher recruits that have an effect on teacher turnover in [community]. What do you think about this? What have you observed in your school regarding TFA teachers and their relationships with students, as well as their relationships with other staff/teachers?

Teacher Preparation (preparation for clientele, community, stress)
Two teachers mentioned that their UH-Mānoa, place-based and culturally-based master’s program helped support them in teaching in [community] – they became better aware of the community history, culture and place. Some of your teacher preparation experiences were very different than this. What do you think about how teacher preparation programs are getting candidates ready for the teaching profession – particularly those candidates who will be working in communities such as [community], or in Title I schools? What can be done to better prepare candidates for work in communities such as yours? What kind of effect would it have?

New teacher advice:
Think of one thing that you wish you had known your first year or so teaching. What one piece of advice would you give new teachers?
Any other thoughts you’d like to share?

Other issues/topics for discussion:
Secondary Focus Group Questions

Recruitment/[community] Complex Employment:
It seems that relationships with students, families and other staff members, and knowing you’ve made a difference are strong factors that keep teachers teaching in [community]. Also, support from administration and the ability to make decisions and feeling that your work is validated were important. What do you think about these factors? Do you feel similarly? Do these factors influence you at all to continue teaching at [school]?

It seems that many participants felt that classroom management and student motivation were their biggest challenges. Secondary to that were challenges with the DOE – lack of funding for programs, and compliance issues like EES and paperwork. What do you think about this? Would you agree?

Acknowledgement
Teachers seem to be saying that you receive acknowledgement and satisfaction from relationships with students, families and sometimes your schools and administrators. Some of you mentioned that this research study validated why you’re doing what you’re doing in your classrooms, or that you appreciated being heard – having a voice. What was mentioned a few times by interview participants, is the lack of acknowledgement from the DOE, your employer. What are your thought on this? What effect would acknowledgement have on your job satisfaction or performance? What kinds of acknowledgement would be appreciated by the institution (DOE), administration/school?

TFA
One interesting finding was that many participants mentioned TFA and the many mainland teacher recruits that have an effect on teacher turnover in [community]. What have you observed in your school regarding TFA teachers and their relationships with students, as well as their relationships with other staff/teachers?

Teacher Preparation (preparation for clientele, community, stress)
[Teacher] mentioned that his UH-Mānoa, place-based and culturally-based teacher preparation program prepared him well for teaching in [community]. Your teacher preparation experiences were very different than his. What do you think about how teacher preparation programs are getting candidates ready for the teaching profession – particularly those candidates who will be working in communities such as [community]? What can be done to better prepare candidates for work in communities such as yours? What is typically not included in programs that would be helpful?

Any other thoughts you’d like to share?
Other issues/topics for discussion