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Engaging Teachers to Improve Administrator Support in an Urban Middle School: an Action Research Study

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ENGAGING TEACHERS TO IMPROVE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT IN AN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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Dedication

For every teacher who chooses to work with struggling students in urban schools.

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Abstract

High teacher turnover in urban schools, such as at the school in which this study was conducted, has persistently negatively impacted school reform efforts aimed at closing the achievement gap (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Since effective teachers have the greatest direct impact upon improving student achievement, high teacher turnover rates in low-performing schools that serve large populations of minority and low-income students help perpetuate the low performance of those schools (Ingersoll, 2002; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Stronge, 2010; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Furthermore, research indicates that teachers tend to stay in schools where a positive, supportive, collaborative school culture exists and where teachers play a role in decision making (Ado, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Johnson, 2011). The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to identify and explore a potential systemic intervention that would improve teachers' perceptions of administrator support in order to eventually improve teacher retention in an urban middle school. By comparative analysis using a t-test of the pre- and post-survey results from the administration of the Principal Support Survey (DiPaola, 2012) that included the addition of three open-ended questions relating to teachers' experiences with and wishes for administrative support, the study results indicated that after four months, implementation of a weekly observation and coaching protocol yielded a statistically significant increase in teachers' perceptions of appraisal support. Recommendations included providing ongoing, individualized coaching support to teachers and to those coaching teachers, in addition to revising external accountability measures to ensure time for coaching and to reduce teacher stress.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

High teacher turnover in high-poverty, urban schools, such as at the school in which this study was conducted, has persistently negatively impacted school reform efforts aimed at closing the achievement gap for the students they serve (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Since effective teachers have the greatest direct impact upon improving student achievement, high teacher turnover rates in low-performing schools that serve large populations of minority and low-income students help perpetuate the low performance of those schools (Ingersoll, 2002; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Stronge, 2010; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Thus, finding ways to support teachers in order to prevent their either leaving urban schools or leaving the profession altogether remains key in helping close the achievement gap for minority students and students living in poverty.

Statement of Action Research Problem

This study examined the problem of high teacher turnover in a high-poverty, high-minority, underperforming middle school, which, for the purposes of this study, will be called Hope Middle School (HMS). This school, which was designated as "Accreditation Denied" by the state's education department in January 2016, suffered from chronically high teacher turnover, which may have been a significant factor in the school's persistent struggle to increase student achievement to meet state accreditation

benchmarks. Teacher turnover causes a "disruptive organizational influence" even if the replacement teachers in a given school are at least as effective as those who left because "when teachers leave schools, previously held relationships and relational patterns are altered" (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 7). This chronic disruption of professional relationships subsequently prevents building and maintaining necessary collaborative trust, which in turn impedes a school's improvement efforts (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; M. Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Furthermore, prior to this study, HMS had struggled consistently with attracting high quality, experienced teachers, further compounding student achievement problems. Teachers new to HMS tended to be novice teachers with less than five years of experience and/or teachers with provisional certification that entered into teaching with little to no formal teacher preparation. The lack of experienced, highly qualified teachers at HMS is mirrored in other urban, underperforming schools across the nation (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

Evidence supporting the existence of the problem. Having teachers leave schools in high numbers significantly hampers efforts to establish a consistent, quality instructional program in order to improve student achievement (Ado, 2013; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Stronge, 2010; Sutcher et al., 2016). At HMS, the turnover of faculty for the three years immediately preceding this study varied between 20-30% of the faculty each year, with the majority of the turnover consisting of teachers who taught English, math, science, and special education. Student achievement in English, math, and science remained at levels far below state achievement requirements over the six years prior to this study. The persistently low student

achievement rates at HMS resulted in the state's denying the school accreditation. Additionally, though the accreditation standards when this study began did not account for student population reporting-group gaps and were not cited in the school's initial denial of accreditation, students with disabilities consistently performed 40 to 60 percentage points below their non-disabled peers in all four core subject areas. Expectations for closing achievement gaps were factored into the state's new accreditation system, which began phasing in during the 2017-2018 tested year, however.

Probable causes related to the problem. The bulk of teacher turnover results from teachers' dissatisfaction with working conditions in a school (Boyd et al., 2011; Fall, 2010; Ingersoll, 2002; Player, Youngs, Perrone, & Grogan, 2017; Ryan et al., 2017; Sedivy-Benton & Boden-McGill, 2012; Sutcher et al., 2016). Teachers leaving their schools cite a lack of support from administrators as a major contributing factor to their departure (Ado, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Fall, 2010; Ingersoll, 2002; Johnson, 2011; Sutcher et al., 2016). Additionally, in an underperforming school such as HMS, Ryan et al. (2017) found that the emphasis upon accountability raised teachers' reported stress significantly and increased teachers' propensity to migrate to other schools that were meeting accountability benchmarks or to leave the profession altogether.

Context of the Action Research Problem

HMS had not met state accreditation benchmarks in English, math, and science for four years prior to my arrival as principal in July 2015. Additionally, even before the 2011-2012 school year, the school had struggled with meeting benchmarks year-to-year, with some years the school meeting the benchmarks and some years the school being designated "Accredited with Warning" for failing to meet state requirements. HMS

teachers had worked under three principals during the five years prior to my arrival, with principals staying no more than two years before leaving. In addition to difficulty meeting accreditation requirements, the school also suffered from high out-of-school suspension rates and high rates of fighting and other disorderly incidents that significantly negatively affected the learning environment. Furthermore, teachers reported feeling unsupported by the principal and assistant principals, and teacher turnover at HMS was chronically high.

Information related to the organization. HMS is a large, urban middle school in coastal Virginia that serves approximately 900 students in the seventh and eighth grades. The majority of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch (68%), though at the time of this study administrators believed that this number should have been higher, based upon the number of students who had charged lunches for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years and had not settled their accounts even after repeated reminders and contact with families. (The division absorbed this cost and never denied a student a meal.) Considering the students who consistently charged for meals of during the time frame of this study, the free/reduced-price rate neared 85%. The demographic breakdown of the students is as follows: 72.8% African-American, 20.6% White, 4.3% two or more races, 1.6% Asian, .4% Native Hawaiian, and .3% Native American. Of the total student population, 11% receive special education services, with an equal distribution of students with disabilities in both grade levels. Furthermore, this school serves all of the English Language Learners (ELL) in the middle school grades in the division, although that number remains low (during the time of the study, 12 ELL students were bused to the school from various parts of the city).

Uniquely, this school serves not only as a neighborhood school for the neighborhood in which it is situated, but also serves students in the downtown area of the city, which is a 25-minute car ride away over an inlet river. This geographical barrier can be significant for families, as many of them do not have their own transportation, and the public bus stop nearest to the school is over two miles and a 30-45 minute walk away from the school. Because students only attend the middle school for 2 years, this reality presents a challenge to forging positive relationships between the school and families. Approximately a third of the students at this school attend the high school that is located downtown, about 20% of students attend the high school across town from this middle school, and the remaining population attends the high school just a quarter of a mile away from HMS.

Additionally, this school has struggled historically with retaining teachers, with over a third of the teachers leaving during Summer 2015 prior my arrival. Teacher attendance and filling substitute positions on a daily basis was also a significant challenge. Due to a shortage of substitutes, previous administrators used special educators to cover classes when substitutes could not be secured, which negatively impacted the achievement of students with disabilities. An analysis I conducted in Summer 2015 upon my arrival revealed that special educators spent approximately 75% of their instructional time subbing for absent general education teachers during 2014-2015.

When the division superintendent interviewed me for the principalship of HMS, he shared with me that the school was suffering from three problems: lack of accreditation, a staff that was unhappy and did not trust administrators, and high rates of

disciplinary infractions. Therefore, once I accepted and was confirmed in the position, I sent an open-ended, qualitative Continue, Stop, Start survey to all staff, which included four items, in order to begin to learn about the school's climate and culture:

1. At HMS, what should we continue to do?
2. At HMS, what should we stop doing?
3. At HMS, what should we start doing?
4. Please provide us with any additional information you feel we need to know as we plan for the upcoming school year.

The survey was anonymous and distributed through our school-wide email system. I gave the staff about two weeks to take the survey, and the number of responses indicated about a 50% response rate. I analyzed the responses by first sorting each comment into themes. I then categorized the responses in each theme into categories and subcategories. My analysis of the responses affirmed what the superintendent had shared with me before I accepted the position: the teachers did not feel safe in the school, they did not believe that all students could and would learn given appropriate supports and interventions, and teachers did not feel valued as professionals by administrators. Additionally, my analysis of discipline trends when I arrived that summer revealed that students' behavior posed significant obstacles to providing a safe, positive, nurturing learning environment. Suspension rates were high, and the school had not implemented a proactive, holistic, tiered intervention and support system for students for behavior, attendance, and academic achievement.

As shown in Table 1, for the three years leading up to this study, teacher turnover at HMS was substantial.

Table 1

Teacher Turnover Percentage Rates by School Year and Teaching Content Area

School Year	All Teachers	English	Math	Science	Social Studies	Special Education
2014-2015	29%	40%	30%	50%	50%	20%
2015-2016	8%	20%	10%	25%	13%	0%
2016-2017	17%	0%	50%*	13%	33%	20%

Note. "All teachers" includes teachers in all four core content areas plus health/physical education and elective teachers. Percentages refer to teachers who left at the end of the designated school year. Percentages include teachers who were promoted, who left of their own choice, and those who were not offered contracts for the following year. *In 2016-2017, 20% of the math teachers left due to promotion within the school division.

Information related to the intended stakeholders. Though at the time of this study teachers' perceptions of the HMS climate had improved since July 2015, teachers still at times reported feeling great pressure and stress, in addition to feeling somewhat disconnected from others on the staff. Additionally, teacher absentee rates remained high. Therefore, in order to help HMS identify areas that would improve teachers' perceptions of a positive, supportive, collaborative climate and in turn improved working conditions in the school, the entire staff engaged in a day-long appreciative inquiry (AI) process on August 28, 2017. We chose to use AI because we had achieved some improvement during the previous two years and AI would allow us to identify those strengths and build upon them as we worked to achieve the positive future we envisioned for ourselves.

Themes that the staff identified for focus for the year during the AI process included improving transparent communication to build relationships, building teamwork/camaraderie, increasing family engagement, celebrating accomplishments, and increasing support from building leadership (administrative support). Collaborative

Learning Teams (CLTs) of teachers teaching in the same content area that had common planning time built into the daily master schedule each chose one theme to transform into a provocative proposition, along with planning action steps to ensure that those propositions became reality (see Appendix A for the planning form). However, the CLT that chose to work on improving support from leadership struggled with how they could increase administrative support, as they did not feel they had direct control over this area.

Thus, the administrative team, which was composed of the two assistant principals and me, decided to investigate how we could increase our support to teachers. Through this action research study, we sought to benefit the faculty and students at HMS by identifying one or more strategies that we administrators could implement in order to increase teachers' perceptions of administrator support. By increasing administrative support to teachers, we intended to reduce and eventually stabilize our teacher turnover rate, which would in turn reduce organizational disruption and increase student achievement. Additionally, we hypothesized that by increasing perceptions of administrator support we could also improve teachers' daily attendance at school, a potential side-effect of increasing perceptions of administrator support.

Theoretical Framework

This study examined the problem of high teacher turnover at HMS. Reasons for teachers' leaving a school generally range widely from what is out of a school's control (low salaries), to areas that may be more difficult to define (student motivation) and finally to lack of teachers' perceived control, such as with student discipline and decision-making practices (Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2002). Though these were generalized reasons cited in the research, the context in which teachers work may vary

greatly from school to school and remains a critical element in identifying best practices for teacher support and retention (Ado, 2013; Johnson, 2011). Thus, understanding our specific school's context remained a critical component in our work to reduce teacher turnover at HMS.

HMS' retention problem exemplified a school-wide, systemic one that required a coherent, systemic approach to change as outlined by Fullan and Quinn (2016). Fullan and Quinn's Coherence Framework requires school leaders to ensure "coherence making" in the school improvement process, which focuses "on culture and on individuals simultaneously" (p. 4). The framework contradicts the tendency for schools and leaders to simply take a "silo approach" with implementing separate programs as quick fixes and fits well with action research, as the emphasis remains upon working from practice to theory and then continuing that action research cycle to make additional changes based upon the knowledge acquired by doing (p. 5). We knew that simply attacking one facet of the problem would not yield results, as the school's climate, culture, and instructional capacity and effectiveness were all intertwined. We also knew that any intervention that we implemented would have affects across the entire system, and we had to be mindful of not only intended, but also unintended consequences, seeing each proposed change as one that would affect the entire system of our school. Using the Coherence Framework helped us ensure that we focused our direction, cultivated a collaborative culture, ensured internal accountability, and built capacity to deepen our students' learning as we continued to take a school-wide systems approach to improving student outcomes.

While we used Fullan and Quinn's (2016) framework in our approach to school improvement at HMS, for the purposes of this cycle of action research, we chose to focus our direction upon improving teacher retention, which we hypothesized would in turn improve student achievement, always keeping in mind, though, that any changes would create ripple effects throughout our school as a whole. Although generalized research in teacher retention existed, the research remained inconclusive regarding what supports are most effective for teachers in underperforming schools such as HMS, since schools are highly contextual systems (Ado, 2013; Johnson, 2011). Research indicated that school cultures may vary greatly from school to school, and a one-size-fits-all approach or a simple application of a new program would not address the specific needs of HMS as a school, or the individual needs of our teachers. Teacher turnover is thus a complex problem that requires a multidimensional, complex solution that is tailored to the needs of individual teachers, taking into account the existing processes that affect teachers' daily practice. As Fullan and Quinn (2016) asserted, as we work to find solutions, changes would develop organically as we sought to reduce teacher turnover systemically at HMS through our continued action research process.

Action Research Questions

In order to address the challenge of unacceptably high teacher turnover, the school's administrative team engaged in this next cycle of action research to explore potential systemic interventions designed to improve teacher retention in our school. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the working conditions within the realm of control of administrators that teachers consider important to their decision to remain at the

school? If they were to consider migration to another school, what conditions would be most important to them?

2. How can the administrative team implement systemic changes to make the working environment more satisfying to teachers?

3. How can this school change and/or implement practices to meet the needs of teachers?

Action Research Model

Following the tenets of action research, we took what we learned through the prior cycles of action research to enter into the cycle of research described here to determine how we as administrators could support teachers, following McNiff's (2017) action research model, which is depicted in Figure 1. We hypothesized that increasing administrator support to teachers would positively impact teacher retention at HMS.

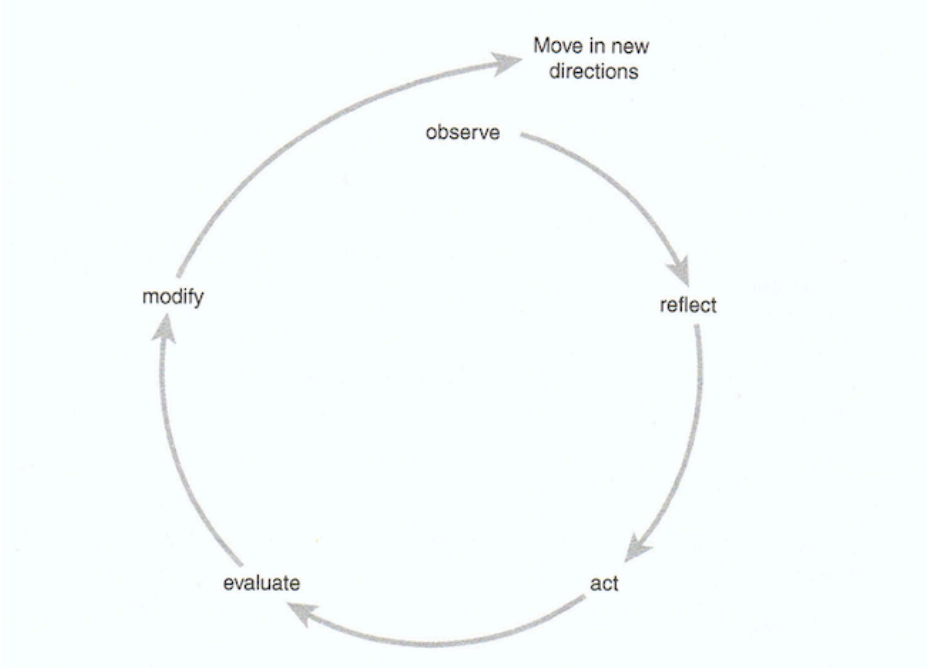

Figure 1. A typical action-reflection cycle. Adapted from *Action research: All you need to know*, by J. McNiff, 2017, p. 12. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

We used McNiff's (2014) guiding questions as the framework for our action research:

- What do I wish to investigate? What is my research issue? What is my concern?
- Why do I wish to investigate it? Why is this an issue? Why am I concerned?
- What kind of data can I produce to show the situation as it is?
- What can I do about it? What are my options for action?
- What will I do? How will I do it?
- How will I continue to gather data and generate evidence to show the situation as it develops?
- How will I ensure that any conclusions I come to are reasonable and justifiable?

- How will I modify my practices in light of my evaluation?
- How will I explain the significance of my research in action? (p. 16)

Brief Description of the Intervention

During this cycle of our action research, we administered DiPaola's (2012) Principal Support Scale (PSS) questionnaire as an online survey that also included three open-ended questions exploring teachers' experiences with administrative support. Once I analyzed the quantitative data from the PSS and coded the qualitative answers from the open-ended questions, I shared the results with the administrative team and our school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). We used those data to identify the areas in which teachers perceived a lack of administrative support and collaboratively developed and implemented coaching supports to teachers based upon those findings. After the coaching supports were implemented, we re-administered the same survey again to gauge the effectiveness of the coaching supports in changing teachers' perceptions of administrator support. We then planned to use these data to modify our coaching approach and supports in order to move forward into our next cycle of action research.

Definitions of Terms

- *Administrator:* The principal or either of the two assistant principals at Hope Middle School.
- *Administrator support:* Any supports provided by the principal and/or assistant principals at HMS that provided emotional, instrumental, professional, and/or appraisal support, as defined by DiPaola (2012) on the PSS. Administrator support also includes discipline support, based upon the needs of HMS teachers.

- *Discipline support:* Support for teachers either through helping teachers problem-solve how to effectively work through challenging student behaviors in the classroom or through providing discipline to students who are referred to administrators by the teachers.
- *High poverty school:* A school with a student population that is composed of 76% or more students who receive free or reduced lunch, as defined by the United States Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.).
- *High minority school:* A school that serves a student population that is composed of a majority (more than 50%) of minority students.
- *Principal leadership:* For the purposes of this study, principal leadership equates with administrator support (Player et al., 2017).
- *Teacher attrition:* Teachers who choose to leave the teaching profession altogether (Ingersoll, 2002).
- *Teacher migration:* Teachers who choose to move from one school to another (Ingersoll, 2002).
- *Teacher turnover*: Teachers who choose to leave a school either through migration or attrition.
- *Urban school*: For the purposes of this study, a high-poverty, high-minority school.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Urban underperforming schools like HMS tend to suffer from persistently high teacher turnover rates that negatively impact school improvement efforts. Given that effective teachers have a direct and substantial impact upon student achievement, high teacher turnover disrupts efforts to improve student achievement (Ado, 2013; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002, Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Stronge, 2010; Sutcher et al., 2016; Wright et al., 1997). Teachers tend to stay in schools where a positive, supportive, collaborative school culture exists in which teachers have a say in decision-making (Ado, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Johnson, 2011). Furthermore, administrators play a key role in establishing the culture of the school and in providing support to teachers. Teachers who leave cite lack of administrative support as a major factor in their decision to leave (Ado, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Johnson, 2011).

Like many underperforming schools, HMS's high teacher turnover rate resulted in significant disruptions to efforts to improve student achievement. When new teachers came on board, even if they had sound instructional skills and experience, we strove to assimilate them into our school's collaborative culture, working to build their trust in us and our trust of them, and ensuring that they became integral members of our school community, embodying our core values as teachers committed to our students' success. Therefore, this review of literature will examine teacher turnover and its causes in general, in addition to factors that contribute to higher turnover in urban schools like HMS. Additionally, this review will then examine the administrator's role in providing

support to teachers, as this study sought to find strategies we administrators could successfully implement to improve teachers' perceptions of administrator support, which in theory, would then lead to increased teacher retention at HMS.

Teacher Turnover Problem

Teacher turnover in schools may result from either attrition, which refers to teachers leaving the profession, or migration, in which teachers choose to move to another school. Teacher turnover, whether due to attrition or migration, results in the school's having to recruit and train replacement teachers, which carries a large expense and also contributes to the "revolving door" that prevents hard-to-staff urban schools from improving student achievement (Ingersoll, 2002; National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, 2003; Synar & Maiden, 2012).

Synar and Maiden (2012) studied a mid-sized urban school district in order to develop a Teacher Turnover Cost Model that included both hard costs (such as the costs associated with the separation of leaving teachers and hiring new ones) and soft costs, including training costs and costs in differences in productivity as a result of teacher turnover. The researchers asserted that though numerous studies have worked to estimate the hard costs of turnover, the soft costs are equally as important, though harder to quantify. Interestingly, Synar and Maiden's discussion included a suggestion to focus particularly upon retaining teachers in urban middle schools, as teacher turnover in their study was high at the middle levels due to teacher frustration and teachers perceiving a lack of support from administrators. Finally, the researchers found that the total financial cost of teacher turnover was quite high and projected it would become higher if focus was not paid to retaining teachers, especially in urban schools such as HMS (Synar &

Maiden, 2012). Thus, the teacher turnover "revolving door" is acute for urban schools and continues to thwart efforts to improve student achievement in such schools that are underperforming (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011).

Teacher attrition and migration. Teacher attrition rates nationally are at an all-time high at approximately 8% annually; additionally, teacher turnover rates (attrition and migration together) are high as well at 16% annually (Sutcher et al., 2016). Furthermore, new teachers, defined as those having five or less years of experience, reportedly left at rates of 40% to 50% in the early 2000s (Ingersoll, 2002). However, the most recent data from the NCES contradicts that trend and reports new teachers left at a rate of 17%, though the most recent study began the year of the Great Recession (2007-2008), which may have significantly impacted the results due to the state of the economy (Cox et al., 2017). For schools such as HMS that serve a majority of students in poverty, the rate in the most recent longitudinal study was higher at 21% (Cox et al., 2017). Thus, a school such as HMS can expect to lose between 16% and 21% of its new-to-the profession teachers, which is reflected in the overall turnover rates the school has experienced on average in the three years immediately preceding this study (18%). HMS's overall teacher turnover rates during those three years exceeded the higher-than-previous national rates (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Individual schools must concern themselves with the overall teacher turnover rate (attrition plus migration). Though traditionally teacher turnover had been attributed to attrition, Ingersoll (2002), in his study examining reasons for the perceived teacher shortage, asserted that urban schools were not suffering from what was commonly understood to be a teacher shortage due to attrition. He examined data that went beyond

simple statistics showing that teachers had left a school. Instead, he analyzed data collected by the NCES that included the School and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) to determine where teachers went or what they did after they left a school. Ingersoll found that hard-to-staff schools, such as HMS, suffered more from teacher migration to other schools or districts, where teacher job satisfaction was higher, than from attrition. He described a "revolving door" in these schools, where teacher turnover was so high that "ostensibly, an entire staff could change within a school in only a short number of years" (p. 1). Though theoretically a school might be able to replace all of those leaving teachers with effective, experienced teachers, this turnover would still result in a negative impact upon student achievement (Hanushek, Rivkin, & Schiman, 2016; Ingersoll, 2002; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Effects of teacher turnover on student achievement. Urban schools tend to have a greater percentage of new-to-the profession teachers, and having high numbers of new teachers has been shown to have a negative impact upon student achievement. First-year teachers tend to exhibit less instructional expertise, resulting in persistently low student achievement, which then helps fuel the pernicious cycle of underachievement for underperforming schools (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). Teacher turnover hurts not only the students who have teachers new to the school, but also negatively impacts the teachers who stay and their students (Hanushek et al., 2016; Ingersoll, 2002; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

In their study of New York City fourth and fifth grade teachers and students over eight years, Ronfeldt et al. (2013) discovered that teacher turnover for already low-achieving and Black students significantly negatively impacted student achievement. The

researchers hypothesized the cause, stating that schools with high turnover find themselves continuously having to cover old ground with professional development and team-building activities to indoctrinate new-to-the-school teachers, no matter their instructional skill level. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) asserted that "When teachers leave schools, previously held relationships and relational patterns are altered. To the degree that turnover disrupts the formation and maintenance of staff cohesion and community, it may also affect student achievement" (p. 7).

In examining the effects of teacher turnover on student achievement in underperforming schools, Hanushek et al. (2016) explored the seemingly contradictory findings of previous studies that indicated that less effective teachers leave underperforming schools at higher rates than those who are more effective. Such rates should suggest that teacher turnover would not affect student achievement. In their study, Hanushek et al. (2016) controlled for bias factors as they analyzed Texas Education Agency data going back to 1989 that linked individual student achievement to teachers in one underperforming Texas school district that had chronically high turnover. First-year teacher attrition in the district was a high 70%, and attrition for experienced teachers was 21%, also higher than average. Their analysis of the data indicated that "net turnover adversely affects the quality of instruction in lower-achievement schools" (p. 145). Furthermore, the researchers found that the "turnover-induced loss of general and grade-specific experience" (p. 145) offset gains that might have been expected by having less experienced teachers leave those schools. Thus, for an underperforming school such as HMS, high teacher turnover, no matter the experience or effectiveness level of the leaving teachers, can significantly hamper efforts to improve student achievement.

Causes for teacher turnover. According to Ingersoll (2002) in his analysis of the SASS and the TFS conducted in 1996 by the NCES, teacher turnover in high poverty schools such as HMS remains significantly higher than in more affluent schools. Ingersoll also found that the most prevalent reason teachers gave for leaving was job dissatisfaction. He asserted that schools were not suffering from a teacher shortage, but instead from teacher migration from certain schools, especially those that were underperforming. According to Ingersoll, teachers who reported being dissatisfied cited "low salaries, lack of support from the school administration, lack of student motivation, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as the causes of their leaving" (p. 26).

Like Ingersoll (2002), Sedivy-Benton and Boden-McGill (2012) more recently analyzed the 2007-2008 SASS and TFS data and found that "teacher influence on school, teacher perception of control, and teacher's perceived support, are factors in teachers' intentions to leave or to remain in the field" (p. 76). Their analysis yielded suggestions to principals that they consider giving newer teachers "support and influence in the school environment" (p. 85) in order to increase teachers' perceptions of support and influence, factors that significantly influenced teachers' decisions to leave or stay in a school. In addition, Sedivy-Benton and Boden-McGill (2012) concluded that schools should allow teachers "some control over their classrooms and curricula" (p. 86), though this may pose difficulties for schools such as HMS that are under strict state requirements and scrutiny.

Similarly, Boyd et al. (2011) further built upon Ingersoll's (2002) findings, unpacking school-specific factors that impact teacher turnover, including teacher influence, administrative support, staff relations, student behavior, facilities, and school

safety. In their study of teachers' decisions to stay or leave public schools in New York City, the researchers found strong evidence that administrator support was by far the most significant factor in teacher's decisions to stay or leave. Boyd et al. (2011) also found that other working conditions, such as school safety, staff relations, and student behavior were important factors that teachers weighed in their decisions to stay or leave schools.

Likewise, in their study of Teach for America corps members who chose to leave, Donaldson and Johnson (2011) found that although seeking additional professional development was the top reason these teachers (who did not have traditional preparation for teaching) chose to leave (even temporarily), the next reason was "poor administrative leadership at their school" (p. 50). Additionally, for those Teach for America members who cited general job dissatisfaction, teachers gave a lack of collaboration or a lack of support with student discipline as the reasons for their leaving. Sutcher et al. (2016), in their comprehensive review of the SASS and TFS databases from 2012 and 2013, the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2008-2012 databases, and data from the Higher Education Act Title II (2005-2014), also found that "administrative support is especially central" in teachers' decisions to leave or stay at a school (p. 52). Other factors that play a significant role in teachers' decisions include "school culture and collegial relationships, time for collaboration, and decision-making input" (p. 52). These other factors also relate to administrative support, as principals directly impact time for collaboration and how decisions are made in a school. Thus, administrators play a pivotal role in teachers' decisions to stay in a given school.

The Principal's Role in Stemming Turnover

Teachers will seek out and remain where they feel supported and where they believe they can succeed (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Thus, principal leadership remains a critical factor in teachers' decisions to leave a particular school (Ado, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Sedivy-Benton & Boden-McGill, 2012; Sutcher et al., 2016). Teachers tend to stay in schools where they play a role in making school-wide decisions and in designing professional development to meet their individual needs (Ado, 2013; Boyd, 2011; Johnson, 2011; Sutcher et al., 2016). Additionally, administrators directly support teachers with student discipline and ensuring a safe environment, also significantly influencing teacher retention decisions (Ado, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Johnson, 2011; Player et al., 2017).

Boyd et al. (2011) defined administrative support as "the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers' work easier and help them to improve their teaching" (p. 307), in addition to protecting teachers from district mandates (Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2002). However, Player et al. (2017), expanded the definition by changing the term to "principal leadership" that is defined "as communicating a vision for the school, providing support to teachers, recognizing strong teacher performance, and enforcing rules for student behavior" (p. 331). Like other researchers, Player et al. (2017) analyzed the 2011-12 SASS and TFS; however, they approached the data from the person-job fit lens. They, too, found that turnover in urban schools was higher than in more affluent schools that served majority student populations; however, their analysis suggested that teachers will stay where strong principal leadership exists. Player et al. (2017) also included that teachers must see the principal "as a strong instructional leader"

in addition to teachers needing to have "high levels of trust in their principal" and "notable influence over school decisions" (p. 331). This more holistic, systemic view includes all of the factors Ingersoll (2002) cited as retention factors over which principals have significant influence.

The principal plays a critical role in creating a collaborative culture to support teachers and to empower their role in decision-making (Ado, 2013; Boyd, 2011; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Johnson, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002). For example, principals can organize the school schedule to ensure time for teacher collaboration in teams, in addition to providing professional development for working effectively in teams, coming to consensus, and managing conflict. A school schedule that structures collaboration ensures that teachers have time in their daily schedules to collaborate with other teachers who have a variety of experiences and have a variety of experience levels (Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson, 2011).

In a case study of new teachers in urban schools, Ado (2013) found that giving teachers the opportunity for inquiry while supporting them through collaboration and allowing them influence over decision-making positively influenced the teachers' decisions to stay. Similarly, Johnson's (2011) case study of new teachers found that an "integrated professional culture" in which collaboration was central was key in ensuring teachers' retention. Such a collaborative structure helps teachers have the opportunity to understand the reflective nature and realities of teaching while allowing for persistence, resilience, and hopefulness through collaborative interactions with their peers. Subsequently, these interactions may lead to improving teachers' perceptions of a positive environment.

As part of the collaborative culture, principals can ensure that the school is structured around collaborative decision-making, considering the voices of both novice and experienced teachers. Central to creating a collaborative culture and providing support to teachers remains building and maintaining trust within the school. Trusting relationships among teachers and between the teachers and the administrators are vital to creating a collaborative culture where teachers feel valued and where they participate in collaborative decision making (M. Tschannen-Moran, 2014). M. Tschannen-Moran asserted that in order for administrators to facilitate the development of trust, they must first remember that in the school community, they hold significant power. Therefore, administrators must "take the initiative to build and sustain trusting relationships" (p. 41). Additionally, in the effort to build, maintain, and repair trusting relationships, M. Tschannen-Moran asserted that principals should take a strengths-based approach, such as AI, to engage in school-wide conversations around trust and trust-building.

Similarly, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that building trust remained at the core of school improvement. In their longitudinal study of 400 public elementary schools in Chicago, they found that relational trust was central to school improvement efforts. Such relational trust involves ensuring that all parties agree upon the roles and expectations each has for the other. In their study, Bryk and Schneider found that such relational trust was built upon the following characteristics: respect, personal regard, competence in core responsibilities, and personal integrity. Furthermore, they asserted that principal leadership remained key in ensuring that the school community was built upon and committed to relational trust among all stakeholders: teachers, families, students, staff, and administrators.

In a school like HMS, where state requirements for following strict check-the-box type processes while providing constant documentation of every task and process can be overwhelming, building trust and allowing for collaborative decision making poses a serious challenge. Ryan et al. (2017) found that in such schools, teacher turnover tends to be great due to the added stress from external accountability measures. In their study, the researchers recruited teachers from three different states and sought to correlate the amount of stress the teachers reported to teachers' decisions to either migrate to other schools that were associated with less stress from accountability or to leave teaching entirely. Ryan et al. (2017) found that high stakes test-based accountability directly and significantly affected both teacher migration and attrition. The researchers also reported a surprising result that though test accountability predicted teacher turnover, pressure from administrators did not. The researchers postulated that perhaps teachers who reported stress were those who viewed stress as external pressure and did not internalize students' lack of progress to their own abilities. However, they also suggested that administrators "focus on school climate and setting-specific interventions" especially at schools with new-to-the-profession teachers (p. 9).

Principal support. Given that teachers working in schools where accountability pressure is high report high levels of stress, and given that the principal's leadership plays a crucial role in teachers' decisions to stay in a school or to go, having the ability to measure and track teachers' perceptions of specific dimensions of principal support remains key in stopping the "revolving door" of teachers in a school such as HMS. Using the work of Bozonelos (2008) and Littrell and Billingsley (1994), DiPaola (2012) defined principal support as "demonstrating appreciation; providing adequate resources and

information; maintaining open, two-way communication; supporting a collegial climate; offering frequent and constructive feedback; and offering appropriate professional development opportunities" (p. 112).

This definition is grounded in House's social support theory resulting from research indicating that a supervisor's support could reduce workers' stress. House stipulated that such support could in turn positively affect the effectiveness of the organization (as cited in DiPaola, 2012). House identified four dimensions of social support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. Of the four dimensions in his framework, House considered emotional support the most important; however, he found that all four dimensions positively affected job satisfaction for workers (as cited in DiPaola, 2012).

Littrell, et al. (1994) took House's social support framework and applied it to schools, looking specifically at the relationship between principal support and special education teachers' job satisfaction. Their study found that principal support directly positively impacted teachers' reported levels of stress, in addition to teacher retention and health, using a 40-item measure for each of the four types of principal support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. Therefore, DiPaola (2012) sought to further refine Littrell, et al.'s work (1994), taking their 40-item Principal Support Questionnaire and using data from a small pilot study to further refine it by deleting some items and rewording others, resulting in the shorter, 16-item Principal Support Scale (PSS). The instrument reflects two main areas of support that principals provide: expressive and instrumental. According to DiPaola (2012), expressive support includes emotional support and professional support, while instrumental support involves providing teachers

with the resources and feedback necessary to teach. DiPaola tested the PSS by administering it to 1,276 high school teachers, and the results indicated that the PSS is a reasonably valid and reliable measure of teachers' perceptions of principal support (Table 2).

Table 2

A Two-Factor Varimax Solution for the 16-Item PSS

Principal Support Dimensions and Items	Factor I	Factor II
EXPRESSIVE SUPPORT		
Emotional Items		
Gives me a sense of importance that I make a difference.	.822	
Supports my decisions.	.825	
Trusts my judgement in making classroom decisions.	.694	
Shows confidence in my actions.	.735	
Professional Items		
Gives me undivided attention when I am talking.	.774	
Is honest and straightforward with the staff.	.818	
Provides opportunities for me to grow professionally.	.700	
Encourages professional growth.	.893	
INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT		
Instrumental Items		
Provides adequate planning time.		.811
Provides time for various nonteaching responsibilities.		.809
Provides extra assistance when I become overloaded.		.720
Equally distributes resources and unpopular chores.		.683
Appraisal Items		
Provides data for me to reflect on following classroom observations.		.652
Provides frequent feedback about my performance.		.735
Helps me evaluate my needs.		.755
Provides suggestions for me to improve instruction.		.574
Eigenvalue	11.312	1.478
Cumulative Variance	70.701	79.937
Alpha Coefficient of Reliability	.954	.955

Note. Adapted from "Conceptualizing and validating a measure of principal support," by M. F. DiPaola, 2012, in M. F. DiPaola and P. B. Forsyth (Eds.), *Contemporary challenges confronting school leaders*, p. 117. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Using AI to build trust and open communication. Emotional support remains the most important dimension of support (House, as cited in DiPaola, 2012). The AI process

can help build trust and provide a means for open communication among all stakeholders (B. Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010). As defined by Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly (2011), AI is:

> a collaborative and highly participative, system wide approach to seeking, identifying and enhancing the "life-giving forces" that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic and organizational terms. It is a journey during which profound knowledge of a human system at its moments of wonder is uncovered and used to co-construct the best and highest future of that system. (p. 22)

The AI process requires participants to engage in positively framed dialog in order to envision a positive shared future. In addition, the process involves all stakeholders and requires participants to connect personally by sharing their own stories and summarizing and empathizing with the stories of the other participants (Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The process has its roots as a method for inspiring lasting and transformational organizational change first studied and applied in the business sector and has in more recent years begun to be implemented in education (Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

For example, in their action research study that worked to transform a dying rural school district into a vibrant one, Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, and Burkhalter (2010) found that the AI process moved their district "from powerlessness to powerfulness through their shared narratives that served to encourage non-judgmental communication, mutual respect, and an acceptance of a diversity of viewpoints" (p. 265). The improvements in communication and mutual respect, along with a tolerance for differing views pointed to

a growth in trust among all stakeholders through the AI process. Such trust among teachers and between teachers and administrators remains key in providing for a collaborative culture where everyone participates in solving problems together, one of the key elements in stopping the teacher turnover "revolving door" (Ado, 2013; Boyd, 2011; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Johnson, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; M. Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Providing principal support through coaching. In addition to using AI to provide support to teachers, principals also can provide support to teachers through coaching. According to the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting lasting systems change in nonprofit, service-oriented fields such as education, "coaching shapes use of a learned skill and guides improved precision, fluency, and contextual adaptation while maintaining integrity to the practice" (NIRN, 2018, p. 1). In order to help teachers implement new strategies in their classrooms, professional development on its own will not suffice. Instead, Joyce and Showers (2002) asserted that training and coaching were both necessary in order for teachers to make real, lasting changes in their practice. NIRN (2018) has found that teachers (and other practitioners) who are trying to implement changes to their practice face three problems:

> newly-learned behavior is crude compared to performance by a master practitioner; newly-learned behavior is fragile and needs to be supported in the face of reactions from consumers and others in the service setting; and newly-learned behavior is incomplete and will need to be shaped to be most functional in a service setting. (p. 1)

Thus, coaches help teachers navigate implementation of changes in practice by working collaboratively to provide critical feedback during practice of new skills, in addition to working through the reactions of students and/or parents as new strategies and skills are implemented and practiced in the classroom. Therefore, coaching provides teachers with support in the appraisal support dimension of the PSS, along with the professional support dimension as the coach (principal) and practitioner work together to provide individualized professional development and growth.

In addition to providing specific support to teachers in skills being implemented and practiced, coaching also requires the coach to exhibit "flexibility, supportiveness, approachability, trustworthiness, and communication [that] are critical to establishing relationships that build a supportive, collaborative, and non-judgmental hospitable environment" (NIRN, 2018). In other words, coaching can provide emotional and encouragement support to teachers, as well (Anderson & Wallin, 2018). Spouse noted that providing emotional support to practitioners is one of the main functions of a coach. Coaches provide support when those they are supporting experience stress (Spouse, as cited in NIRN, 2018). In essence, the coach serves to help the teacher reflect on practice and problem-solve next steps (Anderson, & Wallin, 2018). Additionally, principals can use coaching "to promote a relationship of trust, support, and open communication" to teachers as long as principals remember that classroom visits and follow-up feedback conversations are frequent to help build relationships, instead of being perceived by teachers as evaluative in nature (Trach, 2014). Thus, principals who regularly coach teachers can provide support through three of the four dimensions identified by DiPaola (2012) in the PSS: emotional support, professional support, and appraisal support.

Summary

Clearly administrators play a pivotal role in ensuring that teachers choose to remain in their schools. Since teacher turnover has been clearly linked with decreased student achievement, retaining teachers must be a critical component for school improvement in an already underperforming school, such as HMS. In fact, Player et al. (2017) found that even though teachers are more likely to leave urban schools such as HMS, principal leadership "can promote teacher retention even in context where student and teacher characteristics predict that turnover is likely" (p. 331). Schools function as systems; therefore, subscribing to Player et al.'s working definition of *principal leadership* encompasses the significant role of the principal in reducing teacher turnover, as long as the principal approaches addressing turnover as a systems problem requiring a multidimensional systems approach to potential solutions.

If creating an "integrated professional culture" remains a critical component in ensuring teacher retention in urban schools such as HMS as Donaldson and Johnson (2011) indicated, principals and their administrative teams must make creating such a culture their priority. Such a culture aligns with Fullan and Quinn's (2016) idea of "coherence making," in which leaders synthesize the work of the school community, ensuring a focused direction, building instructional capacity (deepening learning), ensuring accountability, and building and maintaining a collaborative culture. This "integrated professional culture" in essence exemplifies a systems approach to a highly complex problem. AI and coaching can help principals create such a culture. As Fullan and Quinn (2016) noted, "In challenging situations, people are motivated primarily by intrinsic factors: having a sense of purpose, solving difficult problems, and working with

peers on issues that are of critical importance to the group" (p. 4). Thus, the principal's role must include a systemic, collaborative vision to ensure that all students in the school succeed while supporting the school community in reaching that shared goal. Such coherence making, using a systems approach to change, can then stem the tide of teacher turnover and close the "revolving door" it creates.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Given that teacher turnover negatively impacts student achievement, finding potential strategies to close the "revolving door" remains key in systemic school improvement efforts. Ingersoll (2002) asserted that high teacher turnover rates actually indicate more systemic problems "in how well schools are functioning" and is "affected by the character and conditions of the organizations within which employees work" (p. 19). While teacher turnover at HMS may not have been 50% or more as may often be the case in underperforming schools, the persistence of a higher than average rate indicated a systemic problem that, if left unchecked, would impede school improvement efforts. Additionally, taking a silo approach and simply attacking teacher turnover without understanding the context within which it occurs or identifying an individualized, contextual solution that accounted for the complexity of the problem would not yield lasting change (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Rationale for Choosing Action Research

Upon my arrival at HMS in late July 2015, I realized that the school suffered from serious teacher turnover when I saw the list of instructional vacancies. During my initial interview for the principalship with the division superintendent, he indicated that if selected and I accepted, I would encounter three major problems at HMS: the teachers felt unsupported by administrators, student discipline was seriously impeding instruction and perceptions of safety, and the school was probably going to be designated as "Accreditation Denied" by the state's department of education based upon the previous

four years of state assessment data. I knew from experience that all three of those challenges were interrelated. As I toured the school the first morning I arrived in late July 2015, I learned that the previous administration had used a very directive approach: the principal and/or assistant principals gave directives and staff were expected to carry them out without question. Furthermore, as I listened on that and subsequent days, in addition to looking through lesson plans and feedback from administrators left for me in binders, I found no evidence of collaborative practices in the school.

Therefore, my first priority at HMS involved creating a shared decision-making structure for leadership within the school, along with restructuring the master schedule to establish daily common collaborative planning time for content areas within the school day. In early August, a couple of weeks after I arrived, I gathered the current leadership of the school (department chairs, athletic director, guidance director, assistant principals, dean of students, support staff representatives) for a day-long retreat for us to tackle our most pressing issue: student discipline. This core group became our school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). I knew from experience that if we did not create a positive learning environment, then no other efforts for improving student achievement would produce results. Students cannot and will not learn when they do not feel safe, and teachers cannot and will not teach effectively when they do not feel safe or when students cannot focus upon instruction. During pre-service week, I then laid the groundwork for our collaborative journey, and we, as an entire school community, came to consensus on our core values and our mission. Though our school had to work within very directive and constraining requirements from the state due to our accreditation status, I was committed to using shared decision making whenever possible for all school decisions,

including allocating school funds, scheduling, professional development, implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and other initiatives.

At the time this study began, two years after my arrival, our school climate data had shown significant improvement. We had reduced out-of-school suspensions by nearly a half, office disciplinary referrals by two thirds, and incidents of fighting by nearly a half. Through implementation of targeted professional development on using data, including how to use formative assessment data, along with professional development around working with students in poverty and increasing instructional capacity around best-practice, engaging instruction, our student achievement had also significantly improved in core content areas. The staff reported anecdotally and in comments through the triannual Continue, Stop, Start surveys that they appreciated the positive changes in the school.

However, teacher turnover, though better, continued to be a barrier to improvement efforts, as we continually had to enculturate our new school community members into "the HMS way." Therefore, during pre-service week in August 2017, I facilitated our staff's use of an AI process to identify areas of strength within our school related to working conditions. I knew we needed to take what had worked in the last two years and build upon it; however, I also knew that I needed to rally the staff around making lasting, transformational changes as we built trusting relationships. In other words, I knew that though I had brought and implemented collaborative structures and processes to the school, only the collaborative energy of the entire staff could continue to move us forward toward a bright future of continued improvement in students' achievement. Additionally, though I had intentionally worked to create an environment

where teachers were at least partially protected from the external accountability pressures that caused great stress, the stress from rigid requirements continued to wear upon the staff.

During our AI process, we identified common themes and wrote provocative propositions around improving transparent communication to build relationships, building teamwork/camaraderie, increasing family engagement, celebrating accomplishments, and increasing support from building leadership (administrative support). For the first four of the propositions, school teams worked on developing and implementing plans to accomplish their visions for their chosen area. However, the team that initially chose to work on increasing administrative support did not feel that they could effectively approach that issue; therefore, the administrative team, which consisted of me and two assistant principals, chose to explore how we could improve administrative support to teachers in order to help improve working conditions for teachers. Given the body of extant research regarding the importance of administrator support in teacher retention decisions, we knew that tackling this issue would be critical to our school improvement.

Cost/benefit analysis for the study. This study did not cost our school or division any money outright; however, the study did require that the administrative and instructional leadership teams spend time creating a plan of action, implementing the plan, and then evaluating results of the implementation. In addition, once we identified our focus, I did spend personal funds to purchase materials to support the development of our administrative team's coaching skills, especially related to coaching skills in building capacity for classroom management and increasing instructional rigor. We believed that

the benefits of developing and implementing plans for increasing administrator support to teachers would far outweigh the cost in time and effort.

Our administrative team historically spent quite a bit of time supporting teachers new to our school, whether they had prior experience, as they learned our HMS way. Teachers new to us had to learn how to work with our specific students and parents, and even had to learn the minutiae that makes up daily work as a teacher, such as inputting grades, running copies, analyzing data, etc. Furthermore, new teachers at HMS tended to have no teaching experience, and most often, no formal teacher preparation, adding to the amount of support we had to provide teachers new to us. Finally, simply recruiting and interviewing teaching candidates took a large amount of time for us during the school year and in the summer, as we worked hard to attract quality candidates to fill open instructional positions. Thus, we anticipated that our work in supporting teachers would eventually enable us to spend even more time providing coaching feedback to teachers and stopping the revolving door of teachers leaving, which would also help us in our school improvement efforts.

Description of the action research intervention. In August 2017 we used AI to focus upon using a strengths-based approach to improving working conditions at HMS. We ground this choice of strategy in research that has demonstrated that using a strengths-based approach can help build needed trust (M. Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Though we had worked on strategies to improve teacher morale since my arrival, teachers reported the continued need to focus upon improving working conditions. Increased stress, a lack of a feeling of camaraderie, and requests for more collaboration both within teams and across disciplines for instructional and discipline problem solving were

common themes with our teachers. Therefore, we used AI to initiate our conversation around improving working conditions by using the process to identify themes for teams to work on throughout the school year, anticipating that not only the results of the process, but also simply the process itself, would yield improvement in our school climate.

AI process. In a pre-service meeting in August 2017, I facilitated our AI process with our entire staff (see Appendix B for the detailed planning agenda for the day). We began our conversation by having staff interact with one another around their first paid job. Staff circulated around the room completing a four by three chart, and completing in each square the person's name, their first job, the location of the job, and anything unusual about that job. This activity served as an ice-breaker after a long summer and encouraged staff to interact around the idea of work to get their thought processes focused upon jobs. We then explained the AI process and our rationale for choosing it for exploring how we could build upon our strengths to create a more positive working environment. We broke into groups of six and from those groups, into interview pairs. Each pair took turns interviewing each other around positively framed questions:

1. Tell me a story about a time when you worked or played in an environment where you were really at your best. Pick a time when you felt engaged and supported by the environment and your working relationship with others. Who was involved? What goals were you working on? What challenges did you face? What dynamics contributed most to the positive environment? What were the particular aspects of that context that brought out the best in you? Were there particular people, policies, or resources that seemed to matter

most? How did you grow and what qualities emerged under those conditions? Describe the experience in detail.

2. Tell me about the things that matter most to you, that you value most deeply about yourself, your work, and your relationships. How are these expressed in your life and in your work at this school?
3. Imagine that you could transform the quality of the working environment at this school in any way you wanted. What would that look and feel like? How might this change heighten the vitality and health of the school? If you had three wishes for bringing your vision into being, what would they be?

Once interviews were completed, each pair partner analyzed each of their stories using the Analyzing Stories tool (Appendix C). The pairs then used their in-depth story analysis to create chart paper posters that depicted their strengths (on colorful squares), their values (colorful triangles), and wishes (colorful circles), finding in common those three elements from both partners' stories.

Identification of common themes. Teachers then identified common themes in their stories, using their analysis of strengths, values, and wishes. To identify the themes, the interview pairs returned to their original group of six and reported out their combined strengths, values, and wishes. At this point, I emphasized that we were looking at our analysis of our stories for all three pairs in each group, with the purpose of looking for themes, which were the ideas present when participants reported feeling the most joy, excitement, or achievement. Additionally, I shared that themes may be seen as life-giving forces. Each group of six subsequently identified three to five common themes in the stories in their groups and wrote them on chart paper that they posted around the room.

As we needed then to identify the three to five common themes across the entire staff, we conducted a gallery walk where everyone simply read each group's results silently to themselves as they walked around the room. Groups then reconvened and discussed any insights they gained from the gallery walk, noting similarities and differences across the board. Next, I gave everyone five dot stickers and the staff again did the gallery walk individually and silently, placing one dot next to each theme that each teacher found most relevant and worded most closely to his or her belief.

During the lunch break after the dot activity, I had planned to count the dots and identify the top five themes. This task in reality was much easier, as visually the top seven themes were overwhelmingly clear with the most dots. Two of the top themes were very similar, so upon the staff's return from the break, we held a whole-group discussion of those themes and combined them into one, using a fist-to-five consensus strategy in which we did not move on until all staff members acknowledged agreement with our wording for all five themes by signifying with a raised hand showing all five fingers (a fist would mean absolute disagreement, and other numbers of fingers signified amount of agreement up to five). Fist-to-five was a strategy to which our staff was accustomed, as I had first introduced it two years previously upon my arrival, and our group norms help us use the strategy to reach consensus. The themes that the staff identified included increasing transparency of communications in order to build better relationships, building teamwork and camaraderie, increasing family engagement, celebrating accomplishments, and increasing support from building leadership (administrators).

Crafting provocative propositions. After identifying the top five themes important to the staff, we reorganized ourselves by sitting together in CLTs, which have common

planning time built into their daily schedules during the school year. As a whole group discussion, CLTs each then chose which theme they wanted to adopt. No two teams wanted the same theme, so this activity did not require further discussion for consensus. I instructed the teams to then write a provocative proposition – one sentence that would put that theme or dream of what a positive working environment at HMS would actually look like into challenging, inspiring action. I explained that the provocative propositions, when read together, should describe how the school would feel and look when all chosen themes were at their best. In other words, the provocative propositions would serve as our vision for the future of our school. Teams then wrote provocative propositions that described the ideal that was their goal.

Creation of action plans. After writing their provocative propositions, teams proceeded to create action plans for reaching their goal. The teams broke the planning process into detailed steps, enumerating specific strategies, the resources each strategy would require, the people who would commit to the work, along with requests they would make of others, the timeline for completion of each strategy, and the evidence that would signify that each step had been accomplished. The teams that worked on increasing transparency of communications, building teamwork and camaraderie, increasing family engagement, and celebrating accomplishments crafted plans that they all felt were doable within their teams during that and subsequent years.

The team that adopted the administrator support theme wrote a plan that included steps for ensuring open communications and exemplars for interactions between teachers and administrators; however, the team struggled with plans for achieving shared accountability. Additionally, in my discussion with the team as I facilitated this process,

they shared that the power imbalance between administrators and teachers made them uncomfortable with dictating things administrators should do to support teachers. This hesitation exemplified to me the need for administrators to continue to work on building trust with teachers. Additionally, their identification in their plan of active listening as a supportive behavior implied that the administrative team did not necessarily practice this skill. Therefore, I was hopeful that further exploring how to better provide administrator support to teachers would give us a chance to engage in positive conversation around possibilities for improving relationships by listening to teachers, building trust, and really learning what supports are most valuable to them. The extant research clearly indicates that providing meaningful support to teachers could help our school not only stop the revolving door, but also actually create a climate that would attract quality teachers who could ensure our students' success (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Thus, the administrative team committed to working on providing supports to teachers that they would perceive as most helpful to them in their work at HMS as we continued to work on building the trust between teachers and administrators.

Identification of meaningful administrator support. Our next step in our action research cycle involved identifying what administrator support(s) our HMS teachers would find most meaningful for them in their work with our students. In order to identify those support(s), I administered DiPaola's (2012) Principal Support Scale (PSS) at the end of the 2017-18 school year in order to establish a baseline of HMS teachers' perceptions of the support they receive from the HMS administrative team. Because the AI process and previous Continue, Stop, Start survey had both yielded valuable qualitative data, I also included three open-ended questions exploring teachers'

experiences and wishes for additional administrator supports. I administered the baseline survey as the 2017-2018 school year was ending (June 2018), planning to take time over the summer to analyze the data and to collaboratively craft an action plan based upon the results, first with the administrative team, and then with the ILT, planning implementation for pre-service week in August 2018. I personally conducted the initial analysis of the qualitative results in order to ensure the anonymity of the respondents, as some of the qualitative responses included specific names of administrators and/or teachers, or the responses contained clear clues regarding who had written them. I also conducted the initial statistical analysis of results (mean and standard deviation). I shared these data first with our administrative and then our instructional leadership teams, and we collaboratively analyzed the results from the quantitative PSS portion of the survey, in addition to the coded qualitative data from the open-ended questions, to identify specific supports our administrative team could provide to teachers. We used that analysis to then collaboratively develop our action plan to implement when teachers came back to school in August 2018.

Creating a support plan based upon the PSS. The results of the quantitative portion of the initial administration of the PSS (DiPaola, 2012), more thoroughly described in Chapter 4, demonstrated that teachers perceived the greatest support from the HMS administrative team in the area of professional support, while perceiving the least amount of support in the instrumental support dimension, based upon the mean for each dimension. Additionally, analysis of the qualitative open-ended responses revealed that teachers cited support with discipline overwhelmingly as important to them, more important that any specific dimension on the PSS. Furthermore, because the standard

deviation indicated that responses were not clustered around the mean, but instead were distributed across the Likert scale, responses indicated that teachers' perceptions of support were highly individual and the reported means did not necessarily account for individuals' perceptions of support. Therefore, I introduced coaching to the administrative team as a process to provide teachers with individualized support, based upon teachers' own needs, while also allowing for providing discipline support to those teachers who needed it (Anderson & Wallin, 2018; Joyce & Showers, 2002; NIRN, 2018).

After the administrative team began developing our coaching implementation model, the ILT looked at the PSS results during the ILT retreat in early August 2018 and decided that CLTs were best equipped to provide emotional support to teachers, given their established collaborative nature, and the teachers on the ILT were adamant that they wanted to tackle that part of providing support, even though they were not administrators. They cited how busy administrators were and that CLTs had the day-to-day informal interaction that could provide the greatest emotional support to team members.

During the Instructional Leadership Team retreat, the ILT also identified Item 7 (*My principal helps me evaluate my needs*) from the PSS (DiPaola, 2012) as one that they especially wanted administrators to target, sharing that often teachers were overwhelmed with everything they perceived they needed to change in classrooms, seemingly all at once. For example, a struggling teacher may be facing significant classroom management challenges, while also needing to identify and learn to implement more effective, engaging instructional strategies to reach struggling learners. Teacher leaders on the team shared that teachers often felt confused and torn regarding how and where to start when

faced with so many perceived deficits. This discussion also reinforced to me that we as a school needed to continue to change our mindset from one of deficit thinking to one of looking for strengths upon which to build. Also during the retreat, the administrative team shared with the rest of the ILT the plans for providing individualized coaching to teachers, stating the rationale for our decision: that coaching would focus on helping teachers identify their own individual needs and then begin implementing supports to help them implement one strategy at a time.

Identification of a coaching model. Implementing a coaching model became our identified next step in our action research cycle to increase teachers' perceptions of administrative support, given its potential to positively affect the emotional, appraisal, and professional support dimensions of principal support (Joyce & Showers, 2002; NIRN, 2018; Spouse, 2001). Because I was being trained in NIRN's systems coaching through the state's department of education in my role as a member of our school division's leadership team for implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), I chose to follow the NIRN model for coaching. As this cycle in action research evolved, I was in the midst of attending quarterly intensive two-day trainings in becoming a systems coach, alongside the other members of my division's MTSS leadership team.

In addition, after each intensive MTSS systems coaching training session, I was expected to take what I had learned and implement it in practice in order to reflect and be ready for the next step of training I was attending. Therefore, in keeping with Fullan and Quinn's (2016) idea of coherence making, I needed to make sure that our coaching was not just another program that we implemented, but instead part of the fabric of our system

designed to bring about lasting changes to our school. Therefore, the NIRN model, which is evidence-based, made the most sense for practical implementation for me.

Role of the Researcher

I was positioned as an insider, working collaboratively with other insiders, which included my two assistant principals (McNiff, 2014). I conducted the PSS (DiPaola, 2012) surveys, analyzed the quantitative data, coded the open-ended responses and analyzed them, and then shared the results with the administrative and instructional leadership teams. We then crafted a plan to implement the coaching model based upon the results of the PSS to improve teachers' perceptions of administrative support through principal leadership. In addition, I actively coached the administrative team to develop coaching skills, along with coaching teachers based upon their needs, throughout the study.

In June, just as the teachers completed the initial PSS survey (DiPaola, 2012), one of my assistant principals learned he was being promoted to be the principal of a sister middle school in our same division. This change in administrative leadership presented a challenge to our collaborative work to analyze the survey results in both the administrative and instructional leadership teams. I advocated with division leaders to be able to hire someone instead of having someone placed at my school as the replacement assistant principal, and the division leaders granted me that opportunity. I was able to hire someone and have that new assistant principal in place by the beginning of July. The second assistant principal was beginning his second year at HMS. Due to time constraints, our old administrative team was never able to meet collaboratively in late June to analyze our PSS (DiPaola, 2012) results. Instead, we met as a newly formed team

in early July, first working to build our relational trust between and among the members of our administrative team. Since one assistant principal was brand new not only to our school but also to administration, and the other assistant principal was just beginning his second year in our school, I spent much of the early and mid-summer working with both of them, providing background around our efforts since my arrival in the summer of 2015. Therefore, though we analyzed the results, I guided more of the discussion than I normally would have had my assistant principals been with me since the summer of 2015.

When bringing the PSS survey (DiPaola, 2012) results to the ILT during our ILT retreat in early August, I built upon the three previous years, and we began our work together that morning by having us re-establish our group norms. This activity was how we began our retreat each year; however, this process was even more important, as we had a new assistant principal, whom none of the ILT members knew, in addition to two new department chairs who had been at our school but who were new to their roles on the ILT.

We were able to have honest conversations around the PSS results because of this emphasis upon collaboratively established consensus norms and because most of the ILT was returning. We had already established foundational trust between and among ourselves during the previous three years working together. I had worked since my arrival in 2015 to establish a climate of trust necessary to engage in meaningful change in our school, using the model outlined by M. Tschannen-Moran (2014). I had worked hard to build my own skill in establishing a trusting climate that could manage conflict productively to move our school forward, and while I still aspire to modeling all

described by M. Tschannen-Moran (2014) effectively, our school had begun to evolve into a more trusting, collaborative one. Therefore, the seasoned members of the ILT were comfortable beginning the conversation about the PSS results (DiPaola, 2012), and once the conversation began, even the newer department chairs joined in the discussion, analysis, and planning. In fact, one of the new department chairs actually had some insightful input regarding how to best support teachers emotionally through CLT support, instead of administrative support, which then became part of our plan for allowing the CLTs to focus upon the emotional support while the administrators would focus on coaching.

Participants

As this study sought to improve school-wide teacher turnover trends, the participants in this study included all certified personnel at HMS. Certified personnel included all certified administrators, teachers, the librarian, the guidance counselors, our reading interventionist, and our hearing specialist, a total of 62 staff plus we three administrators. This study did not involve students, families, or support staff.

Data Sources

Data from this cycle of our research included information gathered from the Principal Support Scale (DiPaola, 2012) and qualitative open-ended questions, in addition to the same survey that was re-administered at the end of the study to gauge the effectiveness of the coaching support the administrative team provided in changing teachers' perceptions of administrative support.

Principal Support Scale. I administered DiPaola's (2012) 16-item Principal Support Scale as part of the survey to all certified staff at HMS, both at the beginning of

the study in June 2018 and again after administrators had implemented coaching support for four months (see Appendix D). The PSS has been shown to be a reliable and valid a measure of administrative support and includes instrumental and expressive dimensions. In establishing the 16-item scale, DiPaola (2012) took Littrell, Billingsley and Cross's (1994) 40-item Principal Support Questionnaire, in which respondents rated each item on a 6-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), and tested it in a study of 118 teachers in 24 schools. DiPaola analyzed the results of that test and used it to reduce the 40 items to 16. Additionally, DiPaola (2012) used the results from that test to rename the informational support dimension to professional support, "which better captures the meaning of the dimension in the school context" (p. 115). Additionally, DiPaola (2012) reworded several items due to their either being inappropriate or out of date. The result was the 16-item Principal Support Scale (DiPaola, 2012). Next DiPaola (2012) administered the refined scale to 1,276 teachers in 34 high schools and conducted a factor analysis for each of the two major dimensions, expressive support and instrumental support, finding that both factors were highly reliable.

Like its predecessor, the PSQ (Littrell, et al., 1994), the PSS asks respondents to rate the principal on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) on the 16 items. The instrumental dimension includes administrative support through providing time, feedback to the teacher, and necessary resources, and the expressive dimension measures teachers' perceptions of emotional and professional support from the principal. For the purposes of this study, we modified the instrument to read "administrative team" instead of "principal." Lumping all three administrators together gave our administrative team the opportunity to gauge how teachers perceived our team

as a whole, even though all three of us have different styles and have worked with our staff for differing lengths of time. However, at HMS we approach all we do as teams, not individuals, so this approach was appropriate for measuring how teachers perceived our team.

Open-ended questions. After the initial section of the survey that included the PSS, teachers were asked to answer three open-ended questions in the second section of the survey. Respondents had the option to skip any question(s) they wished. These questions were positively phrased and were as follows:

1. Describe a time when you felt most supported by an administrator. What did you value most about that experience? What difference did it make?
2. Imagine you had the kind of administrative support at this school that made this a great place to work and where you looked forward to coming to work each day. If you had three wishes to bring that vision into being, what would they be?
3. Is there anything more you would like to add about administrative support?

Data Collection

Surveys that included the 16-item PSS and the three open-ended questions were conducted online using Qualtrics survey software. The link for the survey was sent to all certified staff via email and included directions for taking the survey. The email also explained that the results would be anonymous. Furthermore, the email explained that the data, once coded and analyzed, would be used by the administrative team to provide more appropriate supports to teachers based upon the results. Staff members did not receive compensation for completion of the survey. All data were secured; I was the only one

who had access to the data in Qualtrics. In addition, the directions assured respondents that they had the option to skip any questions that they choose.

Data Analysis

The administrative team and I used the results of first administration of the survey in June 2018 to determine the next step in our action research cycle to provide administrator support to teachers. Therefore, after the first administration, I analyzed descriptive statistics for the PSS portion of the survey (mean and standard deviation) for each of the four dimensions (*emotional support*, *instrumental support*, *professional support*, and *appraisal support*) and for each item. For each of the three open-ended questions, I started with coding responses according to a priori codes that were grounded upon the items in the PSS in each of the four dimensions. After coding the responses that fit into those codes, I added emergent codes, as needed, for items that did not fit the a priori codes until all answers were coded. The only emergent code that I added was discipline support, as this theme was very specifically referenced by teachers in their answers and did not align completely with any of the other codes.

After I administered the post-survey 4 months later in January 2019, I again analyzed descriptive statistics for the PSS portion of the survey (mean and standard deviation) for each of the four dimensions and each domain. I also coded the responses to each of the open-ended questions using the a priori and emergent codes from the prior survey. I did not have to add any new emergent codes, as all responses fit into either the already established a priori codes or the discipline support code from the first administration of the survey.

Action research question one. To answer the question regarding what conditions teachers find important to their decision to stay, I used data resulting from our AI process, in addition to data from both the first administration of the survey and the post-administration of the survey, including both the quantitative portion (PSS) and the qualitative portion (open-ended questions).

Action research question two. In order to answer the second question regarding what systemic changes we administrators could provide to teachers to make the working environment more satisfying for them, I examined the findings from the PSS and the open-ended questions. I reported the analyzed, coded data to the administrative and instructional leadership teams. We then selected the most prevalent themes that we could control, which were discipline support and emotional support, from both the PSS and the open-ended questions to focus upon for developing supports to teachers through coaching.

Action research question three. I used the post-intervention administration of the survey to analyze the effectiveness of the coaching protocol we developed and provided to teachers in changing their perceptions of support from administrators. I conducted a t-test to see if the quantitative results from the PSS portion of the survey were statistically different from the pretest to the posttest. For the open-ended questions I once again coded the responses using the method described above, noting if any new themes emerged, which they did not, and I conducted a comparison/contrast analysis of the pre- and post-test responses.

Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions

Delimitations. In this study I chose to include all teachers, not just new-to-the-profession teachers because though teacher turnover is highest among new teachers, turnover (both attrition and migration) affects all teachers. Furthermore, to lose any teachers who have demonstrated instructional expertise and positive student outcomes results in real barriers to school improvement, no matter how many years of experience they have. Additionally, I chose to survey teachers new to my school during the post-survey, even though they had not been included in the pre-survey, as this study was conducted as contextual action research, and I needed the feedback from the new teachers to our staff as we moved forward.

Finally, I chose to focus on administrator support, instead of the outcomes of all of the themes identified through AI for two reasons. First of all, teacher teams were working on the other themes identified; however, their work had been sporadic. In addition, being in all of their team meetings to collect data would have been nearly impossible, given my other pertinent duties as principal. Secondly, the administrator support theme was one that teachers found the most problematic regarding developing a workable plan. In addition, teachers verbalized hesitancy regarding working on the issue, which led me to believe that trust still remained a critical area in which we needed to work as an administrative team, especially since we had yearly turnover with the second assistant principal position since my arrival at HMS (we had had three administrators in that position in three years).

Limitations. This study is contextual, as the findings relate directly to the culture and climate at HMS. The findings may not be transferrable to other schools, though schools similar to HMS may be able to replicate the findings. Additionally, support

interventions may need more time with implementation in order to show statistically significant results in all targeted dimensions. Furthermore, we had another assistant principal change in July 2018, so the pre- and post-survey results reflect two different administrative teams. Finally, the response rate was just 63% for the pre-survey and 57% for the post-survey, which means a significant minority of our staff did not provide input to help us craft our intervention and then to gauge its effectiveness.

Assumptions. This study design assumed that teachers would be forthcoming with their perceptions of support and what they would like to see in terms of administrator support at HMS. Additionally, the design assumed that teachers' perceptions of support would not vary simply due to the time of the school year. I gave the pre-survey at a very busy and somewhat stressful end of one school year and the post-test toward the end of the semester in a new school year after the school's winter break. Additionally, staff changes occurred over the summer; therefore, this study design assumed that the supports identified by those taking the first survey administration would be the same as for those who took the second administration of the survey.

Ethical Considerations

I submitted my protocol to the William and Mary Institutional Review Board for approval. My project was deemed exempt from formal review, as the study was action research that was being conducted as an integral part of our administrative leadership of school improvement efforts within our school. I completed the required training modules for working with human subjects from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative through the University of Miami and submitted my certificate of completion to my committee chair and to the director of the Executive Ed.D. Program.

I sought and gained formal approval from my school division for conducting this action research study in my school. As a participant researcher, I administered both the first and second administrations of the survey using Qualtrics survey software online. I set the survey not to collect identifying data; however, I also set the survey to prevent "ballot stuffing" so that teachers could not answer the survey more than once. I coded the qualitative data and kept it and the code key for the open-ended question responses secured electronically on my personal computer. Only I had access to the Qualtrics survey data. The surveys were also voluntary, with the participants providing consent prior to participation.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study examined whether implementing a coaching model would improve teachers' perceptions of administrative support in each of four dimensions: emotional support, instrumental support, professional support, and appraisal support, as administrator support (or lack thereof) continues to be a reason cited for teacher turnover (Ado, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Johnson, 2011). I used a pre- and post-survey using the PSS (DiPaola, 2012) and three open-ended questions to measure teachers' perceptions before the coaching model was implemented and again four months after initial implementation of coaching. Of the 62 potential respondents in June 2018, 39 participated in the pre-survey (63%). Sixteen respondents chose to answer one or more of the open-ended questions (26%). For the post-survey, 60 respondents were eligible to take the survey (HMS had two, non-certified long-term substitutes at the time), and 34 respondents chose to participate (57%). Of those, 24 respondents answered one or more of the three open-ended questions (40%).

Action Research Question One

What are the working conditions within the realm of control of administrators that teachers consider important to their decision to remain at the school? If they were to consider migration to another school, what conditions would be most important to them?

AI results. According to the AI process we conducted in August 2017, teachers identified five themes that were important to them in

creating a positive working environment, which in turn, would influence their remaining at the school: improving transparent communication to build relationships, building teamwork/camaraderie, increasing family engagement, celebrating accomplishments, and increasing support from building leadership (administrative support). Though administrators influence all of these areas, the one over which administrators have the most direct control is that of increasing administrative support.

PSS pre-survey results. Administrator support falls into four dimensions, emotional, instrumental, professional, and appraisal, and was measured using DiPaola's (2012) PSS. The survey asked teachers to rate their perception of each item on the PSS using a six-point Likert scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Teachers perceived the greatest levels of support in the professional dimension ($M = 4.81$) and the least in the instrumental support dimension ($M = 4.53$) using the means of each dimension for comparison. However, one item from the appraisal support dimension, "My principal helps me evaluate my needs," was the fourth-lowest item (m = 4.33), based upon the mean, with the other items with the lowest means falling in the instrumental support dimension (range 3.97 – 4.41). The ILT, in its analysis of these results, indicated that this item was important for the administrative team to address. The relatively large standard deviations for all 16 items (*SD* range 1.55 – 1.98) indicated that responses were not tightly clustered around the mean for any of the dimensions, as can be seen in Table 3.

Analysis of the three open-ended qualitative responses revealed that of comments that were identified as directly correlated with the items on the PSS, teachers cited emotionally supportive behaviors almost exclusively when asked about a time they felt

supported by an administrator (the first question). However, support with discipline within the classroom (the only emergent code not directly aligned with the PSS), including both providing discipline to students in addition to problem-solving challenging student behaviors and implementing classroom management strategies, was the theme most addressed in the following two questions, followed closely by emotional and instrumental support. None of the open-ended responses described professional support or appraisal support.

Therefore, the results indicated that teachers most mentioned emotional support and support with discipline, based upon their open-ended responses. Though the administrative team had hoped that the three wishes question would provide specific ideas on how to support teachers, to give us a place to start with our next steps in providing support, the responses were often worded similarly to the items on the PSS, like "I wish my assistant principal would support me more." Such responses did not give our team specifics regarding what supports teachers may wish for; however, these responses could have been a manifestation of the low perception of support on the PSS item that stated "Helps me evaluate my needs"—the same item, remarkably, that the ILT identified in it analysis for administrators to target with support. In other words, teachers may not have been able to ascertain for themselves what supports they would find most useful in their daily practice; they just knew that they wished to feel more supported by administrators.

Table 3

Results of the PSS Pre-Survey, by Dimension and Item, on a 6-Point Likert Scale

PSS Dimension and Item	*M*	*SD*
Appraisal Support	**4.605**	**1.581**
7. Helps me evaluate my needs.	4.33	1.65
12. Provides suggestions for me to improve my instruction.	4.51	1.81
6. Provides frequent feedback about my performance.	4.74	1.55
5. Provides data for me to reflect on following classroom observations of my teaching.	4.89	1.65
Emotional Support	**4.494**	**1.838**
8. Trusts my judgement in making classroom decisions.	4.41	1.98
3. Gives me a sense of importance—that I make a difference.	4.51	1.87
9. Shows confidence in my actions.	4.51	1.93
4. Supports my decisions.	4.54	1.82
Instrumental Support	**4.173**	**1.641**
15. Provides extra assistance when I become overloaded.	3.97	1.86
16. Equally distributes resources and unpopular chores.	4	1.93
13. Provides time for various non-teaching responsibilities (e.g., IEPs, conferences, testing students)	4.31	1.84
14. Provides adequate planning time.	4.41	1.76
Professional Support	**4.709**	**1.509**
2. Is honest and straightforward with the staff.	4.53	1.65
10. Provides opportunities for me to grow professionally.	4.72	1.72
1. Gives me undivided attention when I am talking.	4.77	1.75
11. Encourages professional growth.	4.85	1.73

Note. N = 39. PSS = Principal Support Scale; IEP = Individualized Education Program

Action Research Question Two

How can the administrative team implement systemic changes to make the working environment more satisfying to teachers?

PSS pre-survey results. The results indicating that at HMS teachers felt the least supported within the instrumental support dimension could have been anticipated, given the large number of rigid requirements with which teachers were expected to comply, as the school suffered from continued intense scrutiny from the state for not having yet reached state accreditation benchmarks. These requirements included copious amounts of documentation of leadership and content team meetings, classroom observation next steps, lesson planning, professional development, and formative and summative assessments, with which administrators were required to ensure continual non-negotiable compliance. Emotional support, appraisal support, and professional support were the next dimensions, in order from lowest mean to highest. However, given that the standard deviation indicated a large variance of responses among the respondents, in addition to the means for all four dimensions varying only .536 from the lowest mean (*instrumental support*) to the highest (*professional support*), the administrative team concluded that addressing the predominant theme of disciplinary support from the open-ended responses, while also providing emotional support, would probably yield the quickest results in improving teachers' perceptions of administrator support.

The theme of discipline support arose predominantly in response to the questions about wishes and additional sharing regarding administrator support. Additionally, though the majority of responses to the first question mentioned emotional support, some responses to the first question also mentioned discipline support. As an administrative

team, these discipline support responses aligned with our perceptions of where teachers may need more support, based upon our analysis of end-of-year discipline data. The assistant principal, who had been with us the year before, and I had also noted a need among about a third of our teachers for classroom management support, based upon our day-to-day observations of teachers, conversations with them, and our conversations with students and their families.

Implementation of coaching. After deciding to use the NIRN model as the framework for coaching for our administrative team, I had to train and coach our team. I was familiar with coaching basics; however, my two assistant principals were not. One assistant principal was brand new to administration and to our school, arriving in July 2018, right after I administered the PSS (DiPaola, 2012) for the first time.

Given the overwhelming theme of the open-ended responses indicating that teachers needed more support with discipline, in addition to our discipline referral and classroom observation data, I knew we needed to coach teachers in implementing effective strategies for diffusing challenging behaviors. In addition, coaching teachers in engaging students in meaningful learning, especially those students who struggled with literacy and numeracy, was also key, as many of the challenging behaviors arose when students who struggled with learning were faced with tasks that were academically frustrating to them and/or not accessible to them. Therefore, I knew I needed some practical, step-by-step resources that I could coach my assistant principals in using effectively with teachers.

Two years earlier, I had read Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's (2012) *Leverage Leadership* along with his follow-on guide for coaching new teachers, *Get Better Faster*

(Bambrick-Santoyo, 2016). Bambrick-Santoyo's books were a result of his work in charter schools that serve urban populations in several cities, and though those schools are not neighborhood schools (in other words, students must apply to those charter schools), and though some of the techniques, in my opinion, encourage rote responses and over-compliance with adults, some of the principles he explained showed promise, especially if we modified them for use in our school. Bambrick-Santoyo's (2012, 2016) underlying premise was based on the basic tenets of coaching: teachers need to be able to work on one strategy at a time with practical "chunked" steps and opportunities to practice with meaningful feedback along the way, until the teachers master the strategy. Additionally, choosing the appropriate strategy to work on first is just as important as the coaching.

For example, if a teacher is struggling with implementing effective routines and procedures to ensure maximization of instructional time, coaching a teacher on implementing an inductive instructional strategy first may not be effective since the students are off-task and not focused on learning tasks. Instead, a more effective approach would be to coach the teacher on developing and implementing effective routines and procedures, especially as students enter the classroom. Once those are established, then delving into advanced instructional strategies that require students to construct meaning for themselves, such as in an inductive lesson, would prove effective, keeping students interested and engaged in learning tasks, and minimizing off-task behaviors (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2016).

Therefore, during July 2018, I facilitated the administrative team's book study of Bambrick-Santoyo's work. We used the videos provided with the books to watch

exemplar coaching sessions with teachers and debriefed those. We then role-played scenarios with me portraying some of our teachers, helping the assistant principals develop our own coaching protocol, based upon the NIRN framework and Bambrick-Santoyo's work (see Appendix E). I created coaching notebooks for us with tools for creating a weekly observation and coaching schedule, showing our assistant principals how to plan time even for lunch duty, bus duty, parent conferences, and time to deal with pop-up discipline that inevitably arises on any given day in our school, again using Bambrick-Santoyo's work as our basis, but adjusting the tools to fit our specific context and needs at HMS. In our school, first thing in the morning during student arrival is a busy time for administrators, with lots of pop-up parent visits and phone calls, students needing support with conflict mediation resulting from interactions outside of school during the previous afternoon and evening, teacher mini-crises for sudden illnesses or personal incidents, and our check-in/check-out intervention process with students. Therefore, we learned to avoid this time and to block it out on our observation and coaching schedules, along with last 20 minutes of the day. We also crafted a plan to divide lunch duty times and adjust them as needed, based upon student disciplinary needs, coverage in the cafeteria, and needs for observations or coaching conferences during that time window.

In addition, I had established a triage system for dealing with some of the pop-up discipline that arose at any given time, aligned with our implementation of proactive behavior support practices. If the behavior did not need immediate attention, we used our security officers to remove the student and isolate him or her in our in-school suspension room, with work to do, while the teacher wrote an online disciplinary referral (another

system we created to establish real-time referrals and feedback on consequences for teachers), to which the administrator and teacher had immediate access online. In most cases the administrator could finish his or her observation or coaching conference and address the disciplinary incident once the observation or coaching conference was complete, while still supporting the teacher by removing the potentially disruptive student so that teaching and learning could continue.

Another of the tools I created and continue to build upon is a quick reference guide, based upon the techniques found in Doug Lemov's (2015) *Teach Like a Champion 2.0* and its accompanying workbook, *Teach Like a Champion 2.0 Field Guide* (Lemov, 2016). The techniques in these books are easily modeled and shared in coaching sessions with teachers. Each technique also has accompanying videos, which we sometimes used with teachers. These resources proved especially helpful with our newest to the profession teachers who had difficulty brainstorming potential strategies given their lack of experience and/or lack of teacher preparation (many of our newer teachers came to teaching through alternative certification routes). The administrator can look for a specific observed teacher behavior and find aligned strategies to help the teacher problem-solve the issue (see Appendix F).

Our goal was to observe and coach every teacher every week, which meant that each assistant principal planned to observe 20 teachers weekly, and I planned to observe and coach 22 weekly. Though we did use Bambrick-Santoyo's (2016) work as a basis, I emphasized to our team that we were going to begin our coaching with letting the teachers decide where they wanted to start. I coached the assistant principals in how to use prompting to help teachers reflect on their own practice and identify their own

strengths and area(s) in which they would like to concentrate. I created an online log where we documented each coaching conversation with the next step that the teacher identified as their area of focus for the next week, which then became individualized mini-professional development plans for each teacher. We used the log not only to document the teacher's plan, but also to use in my coaching discussions with the assistant principals, in addition to in our analysis to identify what "chunked" strategies for which we might need to develop reflection tools to further support teachers in implementing the new strategies.

A collaborative approach to coaching was unfamiliar to my assistant principals, whose tendencies were to go in and tell teachers what to work on (using a directive approach). Each day (informally) and each week (formally) we would debrief, and I would share the results of my conferences, while the assistant principals would share theirs. We brainstormed together how we might facilitate the next coaching conferences with teachers to lead the teachers in choosing next steps that would yield the most tangible results. For teachers whose conferences we knew might be more challenging, we even role played how the teacher might react. This strategy was key, as some teachers, especially veteran teachers, were quite resistant and described weekly observations and coaching as "micromanagement" in conversations with us and their colleagues. In order to build trust in the coaching process and in us, we had to demonstrate that the observations and coaching were not intended as evaluative tools, but instead were designed to provide support based upon teachers' individual needs and requests. I was keenly aware that this coaching model could produce an unintended negative result of

actually degrading trust between teachers and administrators if the teachers perceived coaching as micromanagement (M. Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Therefore, I continually worked with the assistant principals in developing coaching skills. For example, with one teacher who was brand new to teaching, the assistant principal told me that the students were talking over the teacher and he was not sure how to facilitate the conference with the teacher without being directive. Therefore, I did the observation that next week along with a coaching conference to model how to coach the teacher through the problem. Indeed, I saw a classroom where the teacher was trying very hard to keep kids from talking, yet they were talking over her as she gave instructions and even turning their backs toward her as she spoke.

During the coaching conference the next day, instead of my telling the teacher the problem, I began by asking her what the objective of the lesson was and whether students reached that objective (which she stated they did not). I then simply asked the teacher, "Thinking about yesterday's lesson, if you could have changed one thing, what would it be?" The teacher immediately told me that she would have figured out how to make the students stop talking so she could explain the activity. We then brainstormed together strategies she might try to accomplish that. We settled on implementing clear expectations for routines and procedures as students entered the classroom to set the stage for learning, and we brainstormed together how that would specifically look in her classroom and how she would "reset" with her students (since this was now the third week of school, and habits had formed). We agreed that the next time I came in, I would look for those specific procedures and provide feedback to her on that only, which I did. As we progressed during the weeks moving forward, she then felt confident with

beginning routines and procedures, seeing the clear, positive results of her work, and we moved on to working on strategies to ensure active student engagement during collaborative activities, which she identified as her next area of focus. By modeling this approach for the assistant principal, I could then have the collaborative coaching conversation with him, helping him realize that allowing the teacher to identify the next step really could work, instead of being directive.

Though our goal was to observe each teacher at least once per week and have a follow-up coaching conference with teachers within one to two days, some weeks we struggled to meet that goal. In order to help the assistant principals who were struggling at times to keep up, I took on extra observations and coaching conferences to help keep us on track. However, some weeks I also struggled, due to trainings and meetings, some of which were required by the state due to our accreditation status. For example, once per week for 4 hours at a time, I met with a person from the state to whom I showed documentation and explained what we had been doing during the previous week in order to meet state benchmarks. These 4-hour blocks were during the school day instead of after school, and I was not allowed to meet with teachers for conferences during that time. Sometimes we did observe classes, but then we spent at least 30 to 45 minutes debriefing what we saw to document for the state that I was seeing what I should when I observed, which further impeded my efforts to be in classrooms working with teachers.

Furthermore, in the midst of our implementation of this coaching model in the fall, we were informed that our school would undergo an academic review from the state, which meant that we had to build a file box of written documentation for each area of focus, one of which was classroom observations. In order to meet the requirements of the

review, we had to stop our usual coaching focus wherein our written feedback reflected feedback on the targeted area only (for example, implementation of a rigorous questioning strategy to encourage critical thinking for one teacher I was coaching), and instead we had to provide feedback to teachers on all seven standards with an emphasis upon alignment of lesson plans and lesson activities with state standards.

Though we could have chosen to simply include the written feedback on "chunks" at a time in alignment with our coaching protocol, this would have resulted in further "Essential Actions" from the state, which are basically more actions that require continuous documentation. Though we had observations from the previous school years that met the criteria, the observations had to be from the current school year. Thus, we chose to abandon our coaching model for a short time in order to meet the requirements of the review, further impeding our progress with teachers on their individual coaching plans during the time of the study.

Action Research Question Three

How can this school change and/or implement practices to meet the needs of teachers?

PSS quantitative item comparison and analysis. In order to gauge the effectiveness of the coaching intervention on improving teachers' perceptions of administrator support, we administered the PSS post-survey (Table 4). I then looked at the descriptive statistics for each dimension, and each item within each dimension, along with the standard deviation. Unlike with the pre-survey, the standard deviation was somewhat lower within the appraisal support dimension, suggesting that the responses were more clustered around the mean. I then conducted a t-test to determine whether the

means of the pre- and post-surveys differed significantly for each of the four dimensions. Table 5 shows the pre- and post-survey means for each dimension, along with the results of the *t*-test.

Table 4

Results of the PSS Post-Survey, by Dimension and Item, on a 6-Point Likert Scale

PSS Dimension and Item	*M*	*SD*
Appraisal Support	**5.248**	**.934**
5. Provides data for me to reflect on following classroom observations of my teaching.	5.6	0.7
6. Provides frequent feedback about my performance.	5.2	1.2
7. Helps me evaluate my needs.	5	1.2
12. Provides suggestions for me to improve my instruction.	5.2	1.2
Emotional Support	**4.677**	**1.502**
3. Gives me a sense of importance—that I make a difference.	4.7	1.6
4. Supports my decisions.	4.6	1.4
8. Trusts my judgement in making classroom decisions.	4.8	1.7
9. Shows confidence in my actions.	4.7	1.7
Instrumental Support	**4.529**	**1.323**
13. Provides time for various non-teaching responsibilities (e.g., IEPs, conferences, testing students)	4.7	1.5
14. Provides adequate planning time.	4.6	1.7
15. Provides extra assistance when I become overloaded.	4.1	1.7
16. Equally distributes resources and unpopular chores.	4.7	1.5
Professional Support	**4.814**	**1.165**
1. Gives me undivided attention when I am talking.	4.7	1.8
2. Is honest and straightforward with the staff.	4.6	1.8
10. Provides opportunities for me to grow professionally.	4.8	1.3
11. Encourages professional growth.	5.2	1

Note. N = 34. PSS = Principal Support Scale; IEP = Individualized Education Program.

The means in all four dimensions appeared to increase from the pre- to the post-survey; however, only one dimension yielded a statistically significant change between the pre- and post-survey. The results indicated that the increase in the mean of teachers'

perceptions of appraisal support from the pre- to post-survey was statistically significant ($p < .05$). Thus, teachers reported on the PSS a greater perception of appraisal support from administrators after we implemented our coaching protocol.

Table 5

T-Test Comparison of Dimensions of the PSS

Dimension	Pre-Survey Mean	Post-Survey Mean	*p*-Value	Mean Difference
Emotional Support	4.494	4.677	.646	-.18288
Instrumental Support	4.173	4.529	.315	-.35633
Professional Support	4.709	4.814	.745	-.10432
Appraisal Support	4.605	5.248	.036	-.64285

Note. PSS = Principal Support Scale

The *t*-test conducted for each item revealed two items, both within the appraisal support dimension, that indicated statistically significant differences in their means from the pre- to post-survey (Table 6). Both items showed statistically significant increases. The first was "5. Provides data for me to reflect on following classroom observations of my teaching," ($p = .031$). The second was "7. Helps me evaluate my needs" ($p = .043$), which interestingly had the lowest mean in the pre-test results and showed significant growth in the mean. Thus, the implementation of coaching improved teachers' perceptions of appraisal support, specifically as related to providing data from observations and helping teachers evaluate their individual needs. No significant difference was evident in the instrumental, professional, or emotional support dimensions.

Table 6

T-test Comparison of the PSS by Item

PSS Dimension and Item	Pre-Survey Mean	Post-Survey Mean	*p*-Value	Mean Difference
Appraisal support				
5. Provides data for me to reflect on following classroom observations of my teaching.	4.89	5.56	.031	-.664
6. Provides frequent feedback about my instruction performance.	4.74	5.21	.169	-.462
7. Helps me evaluate my needs.	4.33	5.03	.042	-.696
12. Provides suggestions for me to improve my instruction.	4.51	5.18	.071	-.669
Emotional Support				
3. Gives me a sense of importance—that I make a difference.	4.51	4.68	.698	-.164
4. Supports my decisions.	4.54	4.58	.926	-.037
8. Trusts my judgement in making classroom decisions.	4.41	4.79	.391	-.384
9. Shows confidence in my actions.	4.51	4.71	.660	-.193
Instrumental support				
13. Provides time for various non teaching responsibilities (e.g., IEPs, conferences, testing students)	4.31	4.71	.324	-.398
14. Provides adequate planning time.	4.41	4.62	.617	-.207
15. Provides extra assistance when I become overloaded.	3.97	4.06	.845	-.084
16. Equally distributes resources and unpopular chores.	4.00	4.74	.078	-.735
Professional support				
1. Gives me undivided attention when I am talking.	4.77	4.74	.935	.034
2. Is honest and straightforward with the staff.	4.53	4.59	.879	-.062
10. Provides opportunities for me to grow professionally.	4.72	4.76	.898	-.047
11. Encourages professional growth.	4.85	5.24	.261	-.396

Note. PSS = Principal Support Scale; IEP = Individualized Education Program.

Qualitative item comparison and analysis. In the post-survey responses to the three open-ended questions, a slight shift was noted, as the three wishes question and the

question asking respondents to share anything else they would like about administrator support had more responses coded as emotional support, while the first question describing a time that the respondent felt supported by an administrator had more responses describing support with discipline than emotional support. However, once again the responses indicated valuing emotional support, discipline support, and instrumental support. None of the responses mentioned professional or appraisal support. Finally, the three wishes question again failed to yield specific supports that teachers wished for, even after the implementation of the coaching protocol.

Summary of Findings

Though the duration of this initial study of coaching implementation was short (just four months) and was somewhat impeded by external factors due to accountability measures from the state department of education's upcoming academic review of the school, the results indicated that teachers' perceptions of support increased for the appraisal support domain. The responses to the three open-ended responses wherein teachers described when they felt most supported by an administrator, their three wishes for administrator support, and their other thoughts regarding administrator support continued to show the desire for more emotional support and support with discipline, both in problem-solving how to deal with students' challenging behaviors in the classroom and with direct discipline of students by administrators.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the problem of high teacher turnover at HMS. Since teacher turnover is a complex and highly contextual problem, previous cycles of our action research had centered around identifying goals that would positively influence teachers' perceptions of positive working conditions in the school, including increasing transparency of communications, building teamwork and camaraderie, increasing family engagement, celebrating accomplishments, and increasing administrative support. CLTs chose to craft plans for four of those goals; however, the goal to increase administrator support was one teachers expressed was out of their area of control. Therefore, our administrative team undertook this study to determine what the most effective support(s) could be.

Summary Findings for Study

This study found that implementing a weekly observation and coaching protocol could improve teachers' perceptions of administrator support in at least one dimension of the PSS (DiPaola, 2012), the appraisal support dimension. Additionally, the study indicated that teachers at HMS valued administrator support with discipline, which is not specifically addressed by the PSS.

Action research question one. What are the working conditions within the realm of control of administrators that teachers consider important to their decision to remain at the school? If they were to consider migration to another school, what conditions would be most important to them?

With regard to the working conditions that administrators control, especially in a school such as HMS under great scrutiny from the state, teachers responded on the PSS (DiPaola, 2012) with instrumental support as the area in which they were receiving the least support, indicated by the lowest mean on this set of items. Providing instrumental support involves time for planning and meetings, providing extra help when a teacher feels overwhelmed, and distributing resources equitably. While school resource allocation remains under the administrative team's control, much of the stress teachers reported in the qualitative responses to the open-ended questions included requesting that administrators stop requiring submission of lesson plans, assessments, data, and other such paperwork required by the state's accountability measures. Administrators could not comply with that request, as much as they may have wanted to do so, due to state requirements. However, teachers also cited in their open-ended responses wanting emotional support and support with discipline. Support with discipline included support in helping problem-solve challenging behaviors in the classroom effectively, in addition to providing appropriate discipline to students once referred to an administrator by the teacher. Thus, based upon the results of both the pre- and post-administrations of the PSS (DiPaola, 2012), including the qualitative questions, one could infer that teachers may choose to leave HMS due to lack of perceived support in the instrumental support dimension and/or due to a perceived lack of discipline support.

Action research question two. How can the administrative team implement systemic changes to make the working environment more satisfying to teachers?

To answer this question, we relied on the results of the PSS pre-survey. We noted that the standard deviation of responses for each item indicated that responses were not

tightly clustered around the mean, suggesting a greater variance of responses. Therefore, we inferred that teachers needed highly individualized support that would be responsive to their contextual practice instead of a one-size-fits-all program or intervention to increase their perceptions of administrator support. Therefore, we identified coaching as an intervention that could provide teachers with the highly individualized support that the survey suggested they wanted. In addition, given that a majority of the open-ended responses centered around support with discipline, we decided coaching would also provide a means for supporting teachers with problem-solving challenging classroom management issues, in addition to giving the administrative team a regular glimpse into daily classroom life for each teacher and his or her students. In order to provide this effective coaching support to teachers, our administrative team developed our coaching protocol. During the implementation, I found I needed to continually coach the assistant principals in the seven essential components of coaching.

Action research question three. How can this school change and/or implement practices to meet the needs of teachers?

Based upon the comparative analysis of the PSS pre- and post-surveys (DiPaola, 2012), the implementation of the coaching protocol that we developed was effective in increasing teachers' perceptions of administrator support within the appraisal dimension, and specifically, with the items tied to helping teachers evaluate their own needs and in providing classroom observation data to teachers. Given that the time between initial implementation of the coaching protocol and the post-survey was short (four months), we would like to see if further implementation of individualized coaching will also increase teacher perceptions of emotional, professional, and even instrumental support, as those

weekly coaching conversations have anecdotally begun to spark a more open, trusting dialogue between teachers and administrators. We were constrained not only by the short time between initial implementation and the post-survey, but also by having to stop our coaching protocol for about a month in order to meet the requirements of the impending state academic review documentation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

We found that the implementation of a weekly observation and coaching protocol can have a demonstrable positive effect on teachers' perceptions of administrator support. We found that coaching increased teachers' perceptions of appraisal support, in addition to showing promise in supporting teachers' with implementing new best-practice strategies successfully in their classrooms, such as effective strategies for dealing with challenging student behaviors (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Spouse, as cited in NIRN, 2018). Furthermore, systems coaching (coaching of coaches) and continued implementation of the weekly observation and coaching protocol may provide real benefits not only for improving teachers' perceptions of administrator support, but also for improving student achievement through the successful implementation of high-yield, engaging, best practice instructional strategies in classrooms. Finally, re-examination of state policies around improving student achievement in underperforming, urban schools, such as at HMS, may help stop the revolving door of teachers leaving such schools for those not under sanctions from the state department of education (Table 7).

Table 7

Implications for Practice and Policy

Finding	Related Recommendations
Teachers value discipline support in addition to support in each of the four dimensions of the PSS (DiPaola, 2012).	Provide ongoing weekly observation and coaching support to teachers in implementing best practices for classroom management and instruction, based upon their individual needs.
	Revise state accountability measures to ensure decreased stress levels for teachers and increased support in the instrumental support dimension.
Systems coaching is necessary in order to implement an effective coaching protocol.	Provide systems coaching to support coaches in implementing effectively the seven essential components of coaching with teachers.
	Provide dedicated time for principals to coach assistant principals.
Coaching requires time for the coach and teacher to establish a positive rapport and to identify needs and appropriate supports.	Revise state accountability measures to ensure administrators and teachers have dedicated time for observations and coaching.
	Protect observation and coaching time through coordination of schedules and prioritizing other, less effective and impactful, tasks.
	Schedule all administrative and accountability meetings after school hours so that administrators can maximize time observing and coaching teachers.

Note. PSS = Principal Support Scale

Practice recommendation one. Given a school like HMS that struggles to attract highly qualified teachers, individualized coaching support is even more critical, since teachers often do not have an established repertoire of classroom management and instructional strategies from which to draw when confronted with challenges from struggling learners who exhibit negative behaviors. In order to meet the individual support needs of teachers, administrators should provide ongoing weekly observations

followed by coaching conversations with teachers in order to help teachers reflect on their practice, brainstorm potential solutions to challenges (behavioral and instructional), and implement sustainable changes to their practice. This recommendation is based upon the finding that implementation of individualized coaching support increased teachers' perceptions of administrator support in the appraisal dimension. Additionally, this practice reflects the extant research that indicates coaching provides emotional support, in addition to support in implementing effective classroom management and instructional strategies in classrooms (Anderson & Wallin, 2018; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Spouse, as cited in NIRN, 2018). Furthermore, increasing teachers' capacity to effectively problem-solve challenging student behaviors in the classroom and/or prevent them will increase their perceptions of administrator support and potentially prevent them from leaving the school and/or the profession entirely, especially for newer-to-the-profession teachers (Ado, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Player et al., 2017).

Practice recommendation two. In order to implement an effective coaching protocol to support teachers, coaches need their own individualized coaching in incorporating the seven essential components of effective coaching, including "prompting, performance feedback, creating an enabling and collaborative context, data use, application of content knowledge, [providing a] continuum of supports, and scaffolding" (NIRN, 2018, p. 2). This coaching of coaches is termed systems coaching. Effective coaching is a highly contextual and complicated skill, where the coach must adjust based upon the needs and responses of the teacher. It requires the coach to be open to collaboration with the teacher, instead of simply providing directive feedback based upon perceived deficits. In other words, just like the teachers need feedback as they

practice new skills, so do coaches in order to hone their coaching skills. This need was evident as our administrative team asked for additional tools from me, including developing our protocol for our coaching conversations, practicing scripting, prompting questions, and role-playing how some of our staff would realistically respond to prompts. In addition, the coaching of the coaches must be individualized. For example, in this study, one administrator needed support in prompting with a specific teacher who was new to the profession and did not know where to begin to establish processes and procedures that were effective. Another administrator was frustrated by the resistance of seasoned teachers, needing support in how to reframe conversations as they occurred in real-time during coaching conferences. In order to provide this individualized coaching of the assistant principals and of teachers, I found I could have used support in prioritizing where to start with my coaching, especially with the assistant principals, in addition to deciding whom to place on which administrator's caseload, as our coaching protocol had far-reaching consequences for the entire climate and culture of our school. Each decision affected multiple facets of our school community. Just having a coach to serve as a sounding board for me would have helped me work through next steps and obstacles more efficiently and effectively.

Practice recommendation three. In order to ensure that administrative teams have the necessary opportunity to participate in coaching to develop their own coaching skills, dedicated time must be found for such quality, individualized professional development. Though we met after school almost daily, a half or full day when we could dedicate ourselves to really reflecting on our teachers' needs, role playing potential scenarios, and brainstorming possible prompts for teachers would be invaluable to our

team. This recommendation is based upon the finding that systems coaching is necessary in order to effectively implement a coaching protocol.

Practice recommendation four. Whenever possible, district leaders and state support team members should schedule meetings with principals and/or assistant principals after school hours, allowing administrators to be in classrooms observing and coaching teachers. Administrators' time is already quite scarce during the instructional day due to handling pop-up family visits, discipline, and IEP/504 meetings; therefore, scheduling meetings with other administrators and state representatives visiting the school for accountability purposes after school hours would help preserve observation and coaching time. By allowing administrators more time to work with teachers, administrators could continue to build the trusting relationships necessary to school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; M. Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Policy recommendation. Based upon the finding that the mean for the instrumental support dimension was the lowest in the PSS (DiPaola, 2012) pre-survey, coupled with the open-ended responses from teachers where they asked to be released from documentation activities in which they saw no value in improving their practice or their students' behavior or achievement, state education agencies should consider revising their accountability requirements for underperforming schools. Though Fullan and Quinn (2016) assert that accountability is key in ensuring lasting, coherent systems change, external accountability does not necessarily result in improved student achievement.

Schools such as HMS already suffer from difficulty retaining teachers, in addition to attracting highly qualified teachers, which in turn, feeds the pernicious cycle of high teacher turnover and low student achievement (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Ingersoll,

2002; National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, 2003; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Synar & Maiden, 2012). Furthermore, Ryan et al. (2017) found that external accountability measures caused increased stress in teachers in schools that were underperforming, causing teachers to either migrate to schools not under state sanctions or to leave the profession entirely. Therefore, policy changes are needed to ensure that administrators have time to provide weekly observations and coaching, and to ensure that teachers' stress levels are not unduly increased with check-the-box documentation activities that do not yield increased student achievement and may, in fact, drive teachers away from the schools where students need them the most.

In the midst of this study, the state accountability system had undergone profound changes. For the 2018-2019 school year, for the first time, schools' accreditation status did take into account students' growth from previous years in reading and math (except for in high school credit-bearing courses such as Algebra I and Geometry). For example, under the old accountability system, a school had to have at least 70% of its students pass the state standardized tests in the spring in math and science, and at least 75% of students pass the tests in reading and writing in order to achieve accreditation. Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year (based upon the tests administered in the spring of 2018), the state established performance bands, and students had to show one year's growth from one year to the next in reading or math to be considered a "pass" for the school, even if the student did not achieve a passing score.

In addition, new measures were added to the accountability system to ensure the growth of all students, so a school could have 70% of its students passing math, for example, but have reporting groups that far underperform their peers, which would be a

red flag for accreditation. Reporting group gaps were a new addition to the accountability system. In addition, the new system used chronic absenteeism as a measure for accountability, along with graduation rates for high schools.

Each indicator for accreditation was coded as either green (meeting benchmark), yellow (near benchmark), or red (far below the benchmark). Instead of a school being automatically designated "accreditation denied" for failing to meet benchmarks for four consecutive years, schools would be "accredited with conditions" as long as they implemented a continuous school improvement plan that included the findings ("essential actions") from the state. For example, HMS had made substantial gains under the old accountability system, needing only to increase 6 more percentage points in English to become "fully accredited". Under the new system, HMS actually received credit for nearing the accreditation benchmarks for English (yellow) and had met benchmarks outright for math and science; however, HMS remained "red" for failing to close the reporting group gaps for students living in poverty and for students with disabilities. The school was also coded yellow (nearing the benchmark) for chronic absenteeism. The new system intended to demonstrate an emphasis upon continuous improvement, no matter where the school falls for each of the measured areas.

Though the name of the office that oversees improvement and accountability for schools like HMS had changed from the Office of School Improvement to the Office of School Quality, and though the need for a separate Corrective Action Plan had been eliminated, changes at the school level between the old accountability system and the new had not been evident, as of the end of this study. The academic review process, accountability processes, and required documentation and meetings remained the same

even under the new system, still serving as obstacles to our coaching protocol, due to the time constraints for having weekly four to five hour meetings with a state representative during the school day, collecting documents for academic review, meeting with the academic review team, meeting to debrief academic review results, and so forth.

Thus, though the measures for establishing accreditation and accountability had progressed so that schools like HMS have the opportunity to demonstrate that they are ensuring students' growth in reading and math from year to year, the constraints at the school level for documentation and check-the-box types of activities that do not result in changes to teachers' practice had not yet changed. Therefore, the recommendation remains for the state to consider providing the support to implement interventions such as the coaching protocol described here in order to support the lasting, systemic changes that will result in perceptions of increased administrator support, which in turn should result in improved teacher retention and improved student achievement.

Summary

This action research study, though short in duration, provides hope that an underperforming school like HMS can increase teachers' perceptions of administrator support through implementation of a coaching protocol. By increasing administrator support, HMS could stop the revolving door of teachers, which in turn, should increase student achievement through increased trust and collaboration among the faculty. This study also demonstrates that even though state accountability constraints continue to exist, schools can and should work through them in order to provide increased administrator support to teachers, who in turn, support our most struggling students. Such

a focused, systemic approach to change can ensure that a school like HMS will continue to improve, better serving its students and community.

APPENDIX A

Appreciative Inquiry Planning Form

Provocative Proposition:					
Group Members:					
Strategies	People		Resources	Timeline	Evidence of Attainment
	Commitments	Requests			

APPENDIX B

Detailed Planning Agenda – Appreciative Inquiry

Activity	**Who Will Facilitate?**	**Time**	**Action Taken/To Be Taken**	**Materials Required/Notes**
Warm-up	Admin team	8:00 – 8:15	- Distribute "First Paid Job" handout Give faculty 10-15 mins to fill in the chart completely	First Paid Job handout
Introduction	Kimzey/team	8:15 – 8:30	- Introduction – explain AI process Explain paired interviews	Talking points – AI, objectives, ground rules for the day Handout – Interview questions
Paired interviews	Kimzey/team	8:30 – 9:30	- Interviews 30 minutes each. -	Interview handouts
Stories - listening	Kimzey/team	9:30 – 10:05	- In groups of 6 (3 pairs together), partners share each others' stories briefly. (35 mins) -	- Analyzing stories handout - Squares, circles, triangles - 2 sheets chart paper per pair markers

Identifying themes	Kimzey/team	10:05 - 10:35	- 3 pairs together form groups of 6 - Explain themes (give life – main connecting ideas) – those ideas or concepts that are present in the stories when people report their moments of greatest excitement, achievement, joy, etc. - Explain that is esp important to ID underlying conditions or elements that contributed to success - Each group identifies at least 3-5 themes common to their stories (more is ok)	- Chart paper for listing themes (at least 3-5) - markers Distribute dots for next step (admin team)
Determining most prevalent themes	Kimzey/team	10:35 – 10:45	- Give each person 5 dots. Each person uses one dot to ID most important themes to them	- Cued music Dots

Break	Kimzey/team	10:45 – 10:55	- Break. - Note the top 5 themes on the BenQ board	Write on BenQ
Envisioning the Future	Kimzey	10:55 – 11:30	- Cross-curricular teams choose one of the five themes and write their provocative propositions. - Put the dream picture into inspiring, challenging action. The provocative propositions should describe how the school would feel and look when all chosen themes are at their best.	- Chart paper - Markers
Lunch		11:30 - 12:30	-	
Identifying our propositions	Kimzey	12:30 – 1:00	- Teams report out their provocative propositions	- Chart paper Markers

Planning to achieve our vision	Kimzey	1:00 – 1:45	- Teams plan for innovations using the planning template	Planning handout

APPENDIX C

Analyzing Stories Tool

1. Identify strengths and enabling conditions for each person's story.
   What strengths, assets, or resources made the achievements/best moments possible?

2. Deepen the analysis by asking probing questions to reveal underlying values, strengths, factors, and elements that led to the success.
   What values do the stories reflect?
   What external conditions existed that contributed to the peak experiences?
3. Explore deep values that the stories might reflect.
   What is it that if it did not exist would have made the situations totally different from what they were?

4. Explore what is behind individual wishes.
   What will change if the wish comes true?
   What is behind the wish?

5. Using the pieces of paper distributed to your group, write strengths (from your stories) on the squares (one strength per square); values on triangles (one value per triangle); and wishes on circles (one wish per circle).

6. Make one large poster for your pair combining the strengths, values, and wishes of both persons. This is the beginning of analyzing your data.

7. Prepare to report back.

APPENDIX D

Principal Support Survey

SECTION A The purpose of this study is to find out how much support you perceive from administrators and to identify supports that you would like to have from our administrative team. Your participation will contribute to the development of an action plan to improve our staff's perception of the administrative team's support to them. As a participant in this survey, you will be asked to rate the administrative team (principal and assistant principals together) on 16 items related to administrator support, in addition to answering open-ended questions about how you envision optimal support from administrators.

Participation in this survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Your data from the survey will be anonymous. Your data will not be associated with your name or any code so that your responses cannot be linked to your name in any way. Your participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time, and you may also choose to skip any question you do not wish to answer. You will not be compensated for your participation.

There are no known risks of participating in this survey. We hope that the benefit will be a more supportive school!

Continuation of this survey by choosing to click the button to continue to the next page will be construed as consent to participate in this survey.

Page Break

SECTION B
The following statements are about your perceptions of the supportive behaviors of the administrative team. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements along a scale from STRONGLY DISAGREE to STRONGLY AGREE by clicking the appropriate circle.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
1. Gives me undivided attention when I am talking. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. Is honest and straightforward with the staff. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. Gives me a sense of importance - that I make a difference. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. Supports my decisions. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. Provides data for me to reflect on following classroom observations of my teaching. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. Provides frequent feedback about my performance. (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○
7. Helps me evaluate my needs. (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○

8. Trusts my judgement in making classroom decisions. (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○
9. Shows confidence in my actions. (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
10. Provides opportunities for me to grow professionally. (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. Encourages professional growth. (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○
12. Provides suggestions for me to improve my instruction. (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○
13. Provides time for various non-teaching responsibilities (e.g. IEPs, conferences, testing students) (13)	○	○	○	○	○	○
14. Provides adequate planning time. (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○

15. Provides extra assistance when I become overloaded. (15)	○	○	○	○	○	○
16. Equally distributes resources and unpopular chores. (16)	○	○	○	○	○	○

SECTION C Please take a moment to answer the following questions:

17
Describe a time when you felt most supported by an administrator. What did you value most about that experience? What difference did it make?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

18
Imagine you had the kind of administrative support at this school that made this a great place to work and where you looked forward to coming to work each day. If you had three wishes to bring that vision into being, what would they be?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

19 Is there anything more you would like to add about administrative support?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX E

HMS Coaching Protocol

SIX STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK
Adapted for the HMS Admin Team from *Get Better Faster*

Prepare **During observation & prior to coaching conference**	**Prepare—During Observation & Prior to Coaching Conference** ● Script/take notes. Make sure to note exactly what you see. Be descriptive (i.e. 4 students with their heads down. One student asking the teacher why, etc.) ● Plan your feedback while observing – what will be the "chunk" that will provide the teacher will the biggest impact? Remember – one step at a time! ● Script probing, positively-phrased questions PRIOR to the conference. ● Have teacher's upcoming lesson plans ready for planning ahead. ● Polish the feedback report. Make sure to list the action step (chunk) in the report! ● Prepare any tools, examples, etc. you will provide to the teacher to support him/her.
1 **Praise** **1-2 min**	**Praise—Narrate the positive:** **What to say:** ● "We set a goal last week of _____ and I noticed how you [met goal] by [state concrete positive actions teacher took.]." ● "What made that successful? What was the impact of [that positive action]?"
2 **Probe** **2-6 min**	**Probe = Reflection/understanding** **Start with the end goal:** ● "What is the purpose of _____ [concise action step/taxonomy topic]? What impact does that have on your instruction?" ● "What was your objective/goal for _____ [the activity, the lesson]? What did the students have to do to meet this goal/objective? ● "Let's look at your upcoming assessment and the questions measuring your objective. What will students need to be able to do to answer these correctly?" **REMEMBER THAT RIGOR OF ASSESSMENTS IS KEY – THEY SHOULD MATCH THE RIGOR OF THE STANDARD!** **Analyze the gap:** ● "What is the gap between [your goal/purpose] and [your activity/your in-class quiz/your independent practice] today?" ● "What was the challenge in implementing this effectively?" ● In objective terms, describe exactly what you saw (like a reporter). Present classroom evidence: "Do you remember what happened in class when ___?" [Teacher then IDs what happened; leader provides data if teacher cannot] "What effect did that have on the class/learning?" **Close the gap (present a model, watch an exemplar, debrief real-time feedback):** ● Show video of effective teaching: "What do you notice about how the teacher did _____? How is this different than what you did in class?" ● Model it for the teacher: "What did you notice about how I just did [this action] compared to how you did it in class today?"

3 Action Step **1-2 min**	**Action step: high-leverage, measurable, bite-sized SIMPLE, DOABLE, OBSERVABLE – step that has a SIGNIFICANT impact when implemented.**
	Name explicitly the next action step (chunk): ● Choose an action step that is linked to the teacher's PD goals. "In keeping with our goal of ____, the next thing we want to do is…" ● State clearly and concisely the bite-size action step that is the highest lever. ● Have teacher restate the action step; then write it down. ● Provide tools, if needed.

4 Plan Ahead **As much time as remains**	**Plan Ahead—Design/revise upcoming lesson plans to implement this action:**
	Script the changes into upcoming lesson plans ● "Where would be a good place to implement this in your upcoming lessons?" ● "What are all the actions you need to take/want to see in the students?" ● Script the language and actions to be taken—have lesson plans and/or a template ready for the teacher to fill in. ● Plan before you practice: keep probing to make the plan more precise and more detailed ● "Now that you've made your initial plan, what will do you if [state student behavior/response that will be challenging]? ● **If teacher needs extra development:** Model for the teacher first, then debrief. "What do you notice about how I did that?"
5 Practice **As much time as remains**	**Practice—Role play how to implement action step in current or future lessons:**
	Round 1—"Let's Practice" or "Let's take it live." ● [When applicable] Stand up/move around classroom to simulate the feeling of class ● Pause the role play at the point of error to give immediate feedback ● Repeat until the practice is successful. "What made this successful?" **Round 2—add complexity (if mastering it):** ● [Once successful in Round 1]: "Let's try that again. This time I will be [student x who is slightly more challenging]."
6 Follow-up **1-3 min**	**Set Timeline for Follow-up:**

	● "When would be best time to observe your implementation of this?" OR "When I review your plans, I'll look for this modification."
	● **Newer teacher:** "I'll come in tomorrow and look for this technique."
	● Set dates for all of the following—both teacher and leader write them down:
	  ○ **Completed Materials:** when teacher will complete revised lesson plan/materials.
	  ○ **Leader Observation**: when you'll observe the teacher – WINDOW ONLY (LIKE NEXT WEEK)
	  ○ **(When valuable) Teacher Observes Master Teacher**: when they'll observe master teacher in classroom or via video implementing the action step
	  ○ **(When valuable) Self-Video**: when you'll tape teacher to debrief in future mtg – WE HAVE AN IPAD AND TRIPOD FOR THIS STEP!

Remember, demonstrate through your nonverbal cues, voice inflections, and questioning that you ENJOY working with the teacher.

Enter into each conference with a positive, can-do, we're-all-in-this-together outlook!

WE'RE ALL ON THE *SAME TEAM*!

APPENDIX F

HMS Coaching Quick Reference Guide

Using techniques and videos from *Teach Like a Champion*

Area	The teacher is…	Tech #	Tech Name	TLC FG Page
Classroom Mgt	- Talking but students aren't listening or responding - Having trouble keeping order in the room	56	Strong Voice	
Classroom Mgt	- Loosing calm, raising voice, becoming visibly frustrated - Entering into a back and forth with students	54	Firm Calm Finesse	549
Classroom Mgt	- Having trouble determining or assigning firm, fair consequences - Inconsistently assigning consequences and/or calling out negative behaviors - Unable to respond appropriately when there's a "blow-up" with a student	55	Art of the Consequence	557
Classroom Mgt	- Spending too much time with transitions b/w activities - Having to explain basic classroom procedures/routines each day - Unable to maintain order when distributing materials or transitioning b/w activities	48 49	Engineer Efficiency OR STRATEGIC INVESTMENT: From Procedure to Routine	491 503

Classroom Mgt	- Needing to reinforce expectations, procedures, or routines for individual students	50	Do it Again	517
Classroom Mgt	- Not seeing off-task behaviors - Not effectively monitoring all students	51	Radar/Be Seen Looking	527
Classroom Mgt	- Not enforcing students' beginning work as soon as they enter the classroom - Spending too long on the warm-up or warm-up review	46	Strong Start	469
Classroom Mgt	- Not greeting students at the door as they enter - Not reinforcing expectations as students enter the classroom	45	Threshold	459
Classroom Mgt	- Struggling with reinforcing basic GPS classroom expectations (NOTE: make sure to replace STAR/SLANT with the GPS expectations from our matrix)	47	GPS (Star/Slant)	483
Classroom Mgt	- Struggling to infuse joyful, positive learning experiences into lessons	62	Joy Factor	639
Classroom Mgt	- Struggling to provide appropriate, private interventions to correct off-task behaviors - Interrupting instruction to address off-task behaviors	53	Least Invasive Intervention	541
CM/Relationships	- Continually negatively criticizing students for off-task behaviors - Focusing on negative behaviors	58	Positive Framing	593
Questioning	- Only calling on students who raise their hands - Not calling on students, but instead answering	33	Cold Call	349

	his/her own questions or lecturing - Asking only knowledge-level questions			
Questioning	- Allowing students to not answer questions when called upon - Calling only on students who raise their hands - Answering his/her own questions - Asking only knowledge-level questions	11	No Opt Out	139

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