Teacher Stressors in an

Arizona Urban School District

By

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved November 2013 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2013

ABSTRACT

Teachers have the one of the most difficult, yet most rewarding jobs to guide our impressionable youth into academically prepared independent thinkers. This undertaking requires a commitment, as well as an enormous effort that can oftentimes be overwhelming. Teaching has been found to be a stressful profession for several decades with the potential concern of negative consequences for both teachers and students. The purpose of this study was to view mutual influences that affected the stress levels of urban teachers, as well as gather possible solutions to help alleviate some areas of stress. This study evaluated an urban school district in Arizona to uncover existing stressors for elementary teachers. Through qualitative analysis, this study utilized focus group interviews within this urban district, which consisted of 20 teachers in various grade levels. Four to five teachers formed each focus group, where participants responded to six open-ended questions in a candid setting. Using the grounded theory, major and minor themes emerged as a result of teacher responses that revealed trends and commonalities. Additionally, participants relayed their suggestions to mitigate some of these stressors. This study revealed that the some of the stressors that surfaced were common to the entire group, while some grade level subgroups differed in areas of stress. The suggestion to implement purposeful support systems to improve the stress of teachers was recommended with the proposal to reexamine the results for their effectiveness in future studies.

To my husband, Chuck, who encouraged me to fulfill a destiny, and held me up during some difficult challenges along the way. Thank you for your love and patience.

To my children, Steven and Megan, who encouraged me to realize my goal. I hope I have shown you that anything is possible. I love you both very much. And finally, you can no longer say, "Mom is in college!"

To my mother, who left this world before I completed this odyssey. I hope you are smiling.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"What does not kill me, makes me stronger." —Friedrich Nietzsche

This quote by German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche observed that it

is commonplace for humankind to overcome obstacles. And although obstacles are

conquered, the process can be stressful. Through years of studies, it has been shown that

teachers work in a high stress occupation by nature (Dinham & Scott, 2000; Pithers &

Soden, 1999; Punch & Tuetteman, 1996). Stress is a phenomenon that can produce both

positive and negative results. On one hand, positive stress can be viewed as a motivator

that promotes productivity. However, its negative influences can likewise detract from

productiveness. In education, stress can adversely affect schools, students, and the

physical and emotional well being of teachers (Kyriacou, 1987). In 2001, Chris Kyriacou,

renowned psychology researcher on teacher stress, synthesized three decades of findings

and identified five ancillary approaches that examined this phenomenon.

1. Examine how educational reforms impacts teachers' stress levels

2. Explore reasons why some teachers have higher tolerances of stress

3. Compare the affects the stress to workload with regards to efficacy

4. Assess effectiveness of stress relief intervention strategies

5. Gauge the impact of teacher stress on student interactions

Kyriacou likewise recounted the generally accepted principal stressors for

teachers, such as administration, time constraints, and student discipline with a focus on

intervention strategies. In summary, Kyriacou stated that these stressors could change

over time, so it was crucial for research to keep a pulse on current stressors for teachers

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as they develop. Hence, as a constantly evolving profession, it is imperative to reexamine the existential factors that may affect teachers.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study was to utilize the existing literature and extend the research to examine the stressors of today's teachers. This study concentrated its focus on elementary teachers in an Arizona urban school district. Although there have been many studies conducted to view the occupational stressors of teachers, there have been recent changes to educational policies and higher demands of teachers. There are widely accepted stressors that exist in the occupation of teaching that Kyriacou's study highlighted in 2001; however, this study concentrated on the current stressors for urban teachers in 2013. Although questionnaires or inventories have been widely used to discover teacher stress, this research utilized interviews from small focus groups to uncover the prominent stressors in an urban elementary district from an in-depth qualitative vantage. And even though, Kyriacou suggested five areas of approaching research on this topic, this study looked intensely at causal relationships with regards to prospective resolutions.

Problem

Common stressors related to teaching in urban schools have often included overcrowding, large classes, deteriorating building conditions, and a high concentration of students with high needs (Cappella, Frazier, Atkins, Schoenwald, & Glisson, 2008; Kataoka, Zhang, & Wells, 2002; Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf, & Spencer, 2011). In addition, urban schools can struggle with other issues, such as language proficiency. Students of limited English competency are growing in many urban schools. From 1993

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to 2003, English Language Learners (ELL) increased in the schools by over 50%, from 2.8 to more than 4 million according to the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

In 2005, Urban Institute, (Capps et al., 2005) found that urban schools experienced other challenges in their faculty formation. Teachers in urban schools were more likely to have provisional, emergency, or temporary certification than teachers in non-urban schools. Urban districts also have a more difficult task of recruiting and retaining faculty. Studies showed that one third to one half of new teachers who were placed in high-poverty schools in urban communities leave within their first five years of teaching (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Although accountability policies are not new practices in education, recent reforms have increased the level of accountability for schools, teachers, and students. Some of these include policies like the adoption of uniform standards and recently transformed evaluation systems (Hamilton & Berends, 2006; Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004). There has been a great deal of scrutiny concerning test scores in urban districts, which historically have been lower than national averages from other schools (Snyder, 2003). Educational policies, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), had the ambitious intention of increasing student achievement to the level where every child performed at the proficiency level. The process to achieve 100% student proficiency required adequate annual progress measured by standardized testing of students on core subjects. Additionally, NCLB compelled schools to close academic gaps for disadvantaged students, such as low socio-economics status, disabilities, or ethnic minority background.

However to date, this federal mandate has not attained this arduous goal. Since its inception in 2001, research has actually shown that more stringent accountability through standardized testing has had minimal effects on the bulk of low performing schools. Contrarily, some of these accountability policies based on high-stakes testing have been shown to impede growth for disadvantaged students, especially ELL and minority students (McNeil, 2005; Valenzuela, 2008). With increased testing, unfulfilled goals, and heightened pressure to improve achievement, has this caused undue pressure on teachers?

Research Questions

Even though studies on the stress levels of teachers have been well documented, it is important to reexamine sources of stress as educational practices continue to evolve. This study concentrated on the stressors impacting teachers in an urban elementary district that has a high population of ELL and low socio-economic status students. Although urban teachers are exposed to the same work-related stress of most teachers, more studies that are directly aimed at this subgroup of teachers are needed. The educational profession warrants more data on the causes of stress that may be unique to urban educators, as well as opportunities to minimize these origins of stress. This study aims to provide this data by uncovering stressors of urban teachers.

With these considerations in mind, three areas of focused inquiry guided this study:

1. What are the current sources of stress for urban elementary teachers?
2. Does stress impact urban elementary teachers?
3. What supports are needed to improve identified stressors?

Definitions

Accountability: The term *accountability* in this study was taken from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). The Balanced Model of Accountability defined an accountable education system as "one which ensures that all children, including those with disabilities, benefit from their educational experience through equal access, high standards, and high expectations" (Ahern, 1995). This model depicts educational accountability as composed of the following three components:

- Accountability for inputs and processes

- Accountability for system standards

- Accountability for Individual Student Learning

A common descriptor used for the current educational reform movement is *standards based,* which indicates the importance of standards as the fundamental component. This research utilized the term *accountability* when referring to polices that incorporated a standardized system. The accountability systems of this research are Common Core State Standards, the Evaluation System for teachers, and the SEI model, which are explained in Chapter 2.

Stress: A psychological and physical response of the body that occurs whenever we adapt to change; the conditions can be real or perceived, positive or negative.

Burnout: A psychological condition brought about by unrelieved and prolonged work stress.

Significance

According to Schamer and Jackson (1996), teachers were affected by burnout more than any other public service professional. Burnout, which is caused by prolonged

stress, can result in teachers exiting the profession altogether. Research has also shown that uncontrolled stress in teachers can lead to a decrease in productivity, absenteeism, apathy, and turnover, all of which negatively affects student achievement. Additionally, studies have documentation of teachers in urban schools to have a higher level of stress and burnout among all teachers (Dworkin, Haney, Dworkin, & Telschow, 1990). This dissatisfaction within some inner-city schools has resulted in large teacher migration (Barnes et al., 2007; Shann, 1998).

Therefore, based on these prior findings, this study was significant to identity and document the current stressors of urban teachers. Research has shown that urban schools often have unique contexts in which to contend with as a profession. However, today's increased accountability measures continue to examine school effectiveness with more public transparency. How are urban teachers dealing with these increased demands for accountability? By and large, urban districts can benefit from information that presents possible stressors. School administrators could thwart potential stressors for teachers with proactive steps, which demonstrates support for their staff and ultimately benefits students.

This study with urban elementary teachers offered a better understanding to the intrapersonal perspectives on current stressors in education. Teachers' explanations were closely examined for context. Were these current stressors the result of the interpersonal factors, such as administrative or student influences, or an organizational factor like ambiguous policies or inadequate resources? The practical implication of this study subsists in effective ways to prevent or manage these known stressors.

Education is constantly evolving, yet are these changes implemented in the most effective way? Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) argued that there are two types of change in schools; first order and second order. However they stated that both types of change require specific action steps in order to be effective. This study assembled some specific data for urban schools to consider when constructing solutions to alleviate the stress on their teachers that may require a systemic approach.

Delimitations of Study

One of the primary goals of this study was to capture the current stressors of elementary teachers in an urban school district. The district utilized for this study embodies ten campuses, which comprised a range of grade level configurations. Schools in structure ranged from K to 5, K to 8, or 6 to 8. Although the research was conducted as explained in the Methodology section of Chapter 4, some of the focus groups coincided at two of the schools when interviewing some teachers in Grades 3 through 5 and others within Grades 6 through 8. This intersection of focus groups by school site may or may not have had an impact on responses. This delimitation was addressed by conducting research through the utilization of specific grade band focus groups. Similarly, there were other occupational stressors, such as management style, that were not considered. Therefore, results from certain sites may or may not have been impacted by administrative leadership characteristics.

Research has previously shown that schools in low socio-economic (SES) areas have additional concerns that may contribute to the stress levels of teachers. This study was conducted in a single urban district with high SES; so it was not possible determine if the SES environment was the sole factor in the stress levels of teachers. The literature

review does expound upon the impact that an SES school can have on the stress levels of teachers; however it cannot be viewed as an exclusive contributing cause of teacher stress.

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 contains an introduction, a statement of the problem, and identifies the need for the research. Operational definitions are also outlined in this section. In Chapter 2, the literature examines the key concepts of this study. The research on stress detailed the possible effects it can have on individuals. The literature also reveals the negative outcomes of occupational stress, with attention to the stress of teachers and the effects on performance. Moreover, an analysis of the literature revealed the additional obstacles that teachers often encounter in urban environments. Finally, an examination of the literature showed current accountability policies could pose new challenges for teachers.

In Chapter 3, the methodology delineated the procedures of this study. This chapter was divided into four sections composed of instrument creation, population surveyed, data collection, and the data analysis. The instrument consisted of six open-ended questions; the population of this study was contained to a single school district within a large urban setting. A qualitative approach was utilized to gather data from this urban district that maintained a high ELL student population. Interviews within small focus groups were conducted with probing questions that produced ample data for detailed analysis.

In Chapter 4, using grounded theory, the results from the data collection were presented as a result of employing progressive coding by which themes and subthemes emerged that drove the in-depth analysis. Data were broken down by questions, which

revealed descriptive responses that presented the findings with greater understanding of teacher stressors. Responses were further disaggregated by grade level and experience that delineated discrete trends after data analysis.

Chapter 5, the last chapter, in which the findings are synthesized so as to reveal connections to the research questions of this study. Results were viewed in context with known stressors to teachers from prior research to denote any similarities or differences. The data were organized by trends that are to be utilized in the creation of professional development, peer coaching, or other additional procedures to assist in alleviating teacher stressors. The results were configured through multiple demographic levels to pinpoint the needs of different subgroups. Finally, the research findings also recommended further discussions that could warrant future studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress

Most people live demanding lives. Today, stress is so commonplace that it has

become a way of life. Yet, stress is not always bad. The positive aspect of stress allows

one to concentrate and many people do their best work while under moderate amounts of

stress. Over time, the rewards that one obtains from performing under stresses builds

robust attitudes of commitment and control when tackling tough challenges (Maddi,

2002).

However, stress becomes negative when a person cannot meet the challenges. The

perceived stressors that confront one routinely can deter productivity. Repeated or high

stressors affect occupational performance and also may physically leave one tired,

irritable, or frustrated. Chronic, unmanageable stress can induce emotional problems and

even physical illness.

Defining Stress

Over the last several decades, stress levels have increased. Around the turn of the

millennium, anxiety surpassed depression as the leading mental health issue. The

National Institute of Mental Health found that more than 18% of adults suffer from a

generalized anxiety disorder with women experiencing higher levels of stress than men

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). In 2007, a survey by the

American Psychological Association (Blakemore et al., 2007) noted that nearly half of

Americans claimed that their stress has increased over the past five years.

Although the origin of the word *stress* can be traced to the 13th century, the concept has undergone various interpretations. The term *stress* has been commonly accepted since the 1600s, and there have been several translations throughout the years. During the 17th century, stress was considered a hardship, and in the 18th and 19th centuries, stress was thought to be the pressure applied to an object of an individual's brain. In the field of physical science, its meaning related to elasticity, and in the medical profession, the term *stress* referred to something that contributed to the cause of an illness. Later, stress was more aligned in the sciences suggesting that individuals have a physiological response to external stimuli, or those things that cause stress. Although the majority of definitions stated for stress are still accurate, the most common term relates to the latter definition used in psychological sciences (Hinkle, 1987).

In the 20th century, Selye (1980), defined stress as "'the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it" (p. 127). Selye realized that although stress creates positive biological changes in the body, distress causes more severe biological damages. This pioneer of modern-day stress research developed the widely known understanding of our "fight or flight" response. Later, psychologist Richard Lazarus was recognized for his research of cognitive emotions, including studies on stress. Although his research evolved and transformed throughout his life, his later definition of stress is considered to be a relational concept.

Stress is not bound by an external stimulus or a behavioral reaction, but is a relationship between individuals and their environment. Individuals must assess and react to some environmental stimulus. However, it is important to note that stress is a unique phenomenon that depends on an individuals' personality, values, and other

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circumstances. A cognitive stressor that includes common environmental stressors, such as noise, can likewise produce prolonged uncertainty, lack of predictability and stimulus overload for some individuals. As definitions of stress continued to evolve, some definitions began to incorporate an element of time and pressure. In 2007, Lupien, Maheu, Tu, Fiocco, and Schramek. described stress as the "pressure to perform tasks within a given time frame," which results in a physiological response. The connection of a task with an interval constraint adds another dimension to operative stress. The environmental contexts of Lupien and colleagues' study revealed that a stress response in some individuals could even impact their cognitive performance.

Stress and Teachers

Occupational stress is quite common in many professions, and occurs if there is a discrepancy between the demands of a job conflict with one's ability to accomplish those requests. Kyriacou (2001) appropriately defined stress for the context of teaching. He explains teacher stress by influences that can causes teachers to feel unhappy, anxious, or otherwise depressed, and threatens their security or confidence (p. 28).

Yet, it can be difficult to distinguish between the cause and effects of stress. While the perception of stress, or even the types of stressors, varies among teachers, circumstantial events result in a certain amount of stress for most teachers. One aspect that cannot be predicted, nor controlled is the individual characteristics of teachers as to how they perceive and handle various stress triggers. Coping mechanisms can help regulate the physiological and biological responses and individual reactions to the stressful situation, yet exhibit different degrees of success.

Teacher stress is often associated with a range of causal factors. These

components may include those characteristics unique to the teaching profession,

individual proneness to stress triggers, and universal influences to certain stressors or

various combinations of each. Common stressors may include student issues,

administrative conflicts, and size of workload. According to Kyriacou (2001), symptoms

of stress in teachers may be displayed through anxiety and irritation, compromised

performance, and/ or tense interpersonal relationships at work and home.

People under excessive stress are sick more often than those who are not stressed.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found the following results based on

a job-related behavioral health survey from 2010 (see Figure 1). Indicators revealed that

teachers filed more medical insurance claims than some other professions, and often

blame stress as a reason for sick leave from school.

- 44% of employees report losing 1 hour or more a day in productivity due to stress.
- 22% of employees say they miss more than 6 workdays a year due to stress.
- 19% of employees say they come to work 5 or more days a year too stressed to be effective.
- 20% of employees reporting high overwork levels say they make a lot of mistakes.
- 28% of employees felt overwhelmed by how much work they had often or very often in the past 3 months.

Figure 1. Stress and Productivity Behavioral Health Survey. Adapted from *Delaware educator diagnostic: An analysis of the first state's workforce,* by COM PSYCH Corporation, 2010, published by Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University. The StressPulse survey was conducted from October 15 to November 12, 2010.

Teachers and Student Achievement

Although there is not an overabundance of research connecting the stress levels of teachers and student achievement, there is evidence of how stress affects teacher performances (Khan, 2012). Research has revealed certain dimensions or qualities either demonstrated or displayed by effective teachers that contribute to student achievement. Effective teachers have successful instructional delivery and learning environments (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). Some personality traits of teachers have also shown to be an indicator of student effectiveness. Therefore, since stress can affect a teacher's psychological state of mind, it could potentially hamper their job performance of educating children.

<center>**Accountability Policies**</center>

Until recently in the United States, accountability focused primarily on educational inputs, such as the financial, and material, or human resources available. However, in the 1980s, accountability shifted to educational outcomes; hence the student achievement movement began. States developed uniform standards by state to measure achievement, and started the "standards movement." Although this movement measured educational outcome based on set criteria, there was too much variation between multiple state standards.

Therefore, as a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, an accountability role for the federal government that required states to report student achievement known as NCLB was born. This new accountability policy also created sanctions for schools with low achievement. This new legislation included specific procedures to increase student achievement.

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While NCLB established a framework to reorganize student achievement, the states still operated with different standards. Educational advocates of most states convened to create nationally aligned benchmarks, and created the Common Core Standards.   These common standards have been under development for several years, and now are implemented within classrooms with some continued scaffolding.

Common Core State Standards

In 2010, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was a combined effort by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). The initiative was intended to bring all the states together in consensus to agree upon what a quality education looks like in the United States. The main objective was to define common standards and to create an assessment that measured the level of mastery of those standards, thereby increasing schools' accountability across the nation through common doctrines.

Rationale for the Common Core. Before the inception of the Common Core Standards, each state maintained the responsibility for creating their own assessment instruments to measure student progress.   However, states began working cooperatively on ways to upgrade elements of their standards-based education systems based on international standards. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD*)* has shown that many countries support rigorous, coherent standards in global educational systems. The standards are then aligned using classroom curriculum materials and measured against comprehensive assessments. According to the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), many of the top-performing countries oversee assessments that are more rigorous and strongly aligned to the

standards than many American tests (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). For example, the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) found that Singapore's math assessments tested a greater depth of mathematical knowledge than American schools. When assessing math knowledge, Singapore engaged fewer multiple-choice questions, though utilized more problems that require multistep solutions. These comprehensive standards and assessments help to ensure the alignment of internationally benchmarked standards. Thus, this was one of the goals of the Common State Standards Initiative.

This initiative of aligning the standards was a difficult task to undertake. States had widely varying standards for their school systems, and after many negotiations, this initiative finally began the process of creating common standards. One catalyst was probably because the United States had slipped on the global scale of the compulsory education system according to the OECD that measures the achievement in reading, mathematics and science for 34 countries. In fact, students in the U.S. had fallen behind other countries in comparative tests in 2007 (Aud & Hannes, 2010).

As the work environment changes, most jobs in the next century will require a college degree; therefore students need to be prepared for higher academic levels in their education. By 2018, it is expected that the jobs in the United States will require 22 million new college degrees (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). The collective initiative resolved to align the standards to college entrance expectations with the creation of the Common Core. The consortium determined that the standards must meet the following criteria: (a) clear, understandable, and consistent; (b) rigorous in content and application of high-order skills; (c) build upon current state standards; (d) include global awareness;

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and (e) exhibit evidence-based instruction. Common Core Standards intend to prepare students for the 21st Century and beyond (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008).

New standards. Although many core objectives have remained standard, the CCSS added some new requirements to the content standards. The standards for reading required the development of comprehension, whereas students increasingly advance each year. A goal of these new standards was for all students to be ready for the demands of college by the end of high school. By reading a diverse selection of classic and contemporary literature, as well as informational texts, students are expected to build knowledge and broaden their appreciation of reading genres. The standards do not prescribe a reading list, but instead offer sample texts to explore possibilities of quality literature. However, the standards do mandate classic myths, cultural stories, and the writings of Shakespeare. Other required readings include foundational U.S. documents, and key works of American literature. The suggested reading list helps teachers prepare for the school year and allows parents and students to know what to expect at various grade levels (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).

The new standards also focused on a student's ability to write in diverse styles. Specified styles include persuasive arguments, narrative, and informational texts extending down into the earliest grades. Research writing was emphasized throughout the standards, both through written analysis and presentation. There are annotated samples of student writing available to help guide students with their writing. The CCSS established sufficient performance levels for writing persuasive essays, informational/explanatory texts, and narratives for each grade (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010).

The standards for speaking and listening were designed to help students determine word meanings. This standard will also help increase their vocabulary through conversations, direct instruction, and reading. The CCSS recognized that students must be able to use appropriate English in their writing and speaking, including making informed choices for expressing themselves through language. Another important emphasis of the speaking and listening standards was the ability to participate in academic discussions in various settings. Formal presentations and informal discussions were added to help students join forces to build understanding, and solve problems (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010).

The mathematics standards for grades K-5 aimed to build a solid foundation in quantitative skills. The standards emphasized whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals for these grades. In kindergarten, the standards followed the recommendations from the National Research Council's Early Math Panel report by focusing kindergarten on learning how numbers relate to quantities. This comprehension sets the stage for addition and subtraction. The K-5 standards build upon prior standards and provide detailed guidance to teachers on topics such as fractions, negative numbers, and geometry. The standards stress not only performance skills, but also conceptual understanding. One focus was that the CCSS intended to guide students in the applications of math concepts.

Middle school students must learn geometry, algebra and probability and statistics in common core mathematic standards. Seventh grade students need to be well prepared for algebra in eighth grade. These standards provided a logical and comprehensive preparation for high school mathematics. The high school standards prepare students to

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think and reason mathematically by practicing applying math concepts to real world issues and challenges.

The high school standards set a path for college readiness by helping students develop a comprehensive understanding and ability to apply mathematics in varying situations. At the high school level, the standards emphasized mathematical modeling and the use of mathematics and statistics to analyze realistic situations. This in depth knowledge helps students to understand concepts better, and hence improve their mathematical decisions. Students must learn how mathematical and statistical methods use quantities and their relationships in substantial, economic, and public contexts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010).

Common Core and teachers. The Common Core provided teachers and administrators the foundation, but does not provide directives for execution of the new standards. School districts have determined their own implementation systems and trainings for their teachers and staff. Communication and open discussions between education leaders, teachers, staff, parents, and students was necessary for an effective transition. Schools should be prepared to answer questions by stakeholders, and teachers must be ready to explain to parents how these standards benefit students. Additionally, new teacher evaluation systems were created based on these standards.

Establishing and sustaining long-term partnerships with agencies in the educational system, including state education departments, and higher education agencies was needed. Many districts still rely on these agencies to help push out professional development to their staff, particularly their teachers. Providing supplemental training on mathematics and reading is fundamental with these new standards. Standards also needed

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to be addressed at the college level in education. Higher education, state education departments and local schools must all work together to include these standards for teacher preparation programs and other advanced degrees in education.

Teacher Evaluations

In order to understand the cognition behind the new teacher evaluation systems, one must first review the intent of the federal mandate, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. NCLB was designed to help school improvement by measuring student achievement. Its accountability provisions centered on raising academic achievement standards using the assessments based on those standards. Each state educational agency (SEA) has since developed an accountability system to define adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all schools and local education agencies (LEAs). NCLB required SEAs and local educational agencies (LEAs) to review the progress of all schools using benchmarks to measure progress annually. Therefore, as a condition of measuring student achievement, teachers must now contend with more stringent accountably policies (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Creating Evaluation Systems

The U.S. Department of Education defines an effective teacher as someone that can achieve acceptable rates of student growth. An effective evaluation of that teacher will include multiple measures, and only partly by student growth. Additional measures may include multiple observation-based assessments of teacher performance (Aud et al., 2012). Research has demonstrated that high quality teaching is the most important factor for improvement to student learning. Research also confirms that the quality of teaching can vary considerably, both within and among schools, by the differences in student

achievement (Rivkin, Hanuseh, & Kain, 2005). Other key factors have been identified and constructed for unbiased comprehensive assessments.

Some districts have also included a variety of other measures for evaluating teacher performance such as peer review and feedback. Some schools indicated that student reflections and feedback also would be beneficial. Other suggestions incorporate teacher participation in professional development as a part of the performance evaluation. Another possible provision is the teacher adaptation of incorporating feedback from both formal and informal observations into classroom practices. These new mechanisms are additional components that can help teachers with a broader picture of their effectiveness. Although, these evaluation tools will apply to teachers' performance levels directly, the intention is to help teachers reflect on their performance and improve their craft.

Teacher Observation Instrument Framework

The Arizona Education Service Agency, its acronym (AESA), the evaluation instrument (Teaching Observation Instrument), its acronym (TOI), and the name of the school district (District ABC) are pseudonyms. The Teacher Observation Instrument (TOI) is a united consortium that created a comprehensive evaluation tool for high-needs school districts in Arizona. The U.S. Department of Education awarded an Arizona Education Service Agency (AESA) $51.5 million in grants to implement the initiative for five years, which began in 2010. TOI is currently used in some Phoenix urban school districts. The instrument was first utilized for teacher evaluations in the 2012-2013 school year. TOI through Arizona Education Services Agency (pseudonym) has developed three overarching goals to help schools become achieving and sustainable in multiple capacities.

1. The primary goal is for students to become college-and-career ready upon graduation. Increasing student achievement and growth in all content areas will assist in the attainment of this goal. By focusing on teachers and instruction, TOI hopes to elevate student achievement.

2. Secondly, it is important to reward teachers financially for their efforts in raising student achievement. Part of the challenge to increase student achievement in districts utilizing the TOI is by recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers. Currently, some of these districts have difficulty filling some positions, and approximately 30% of teachers have only one to three years of teaching experience. The observation instrument TOI outlines career paths for effective teachers and principals by implementing a fiscally sustainable performance-based compensation system.

3. The last goal overlaps the second goal somewhat by restating the importance of developing talents in teachers and leadership. The concept of sustainability is again stated through a comprehensive program of performance-based evaluation through support and compensation. Districts are expected to identify or reallocate funding in order to maintain this program when the grant expires.

The TOI evaluation instrument for teachers is broken down into six rubric indicators that correspond to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards. Each rubric consists of specific indicators to score, using a scale of 0-5, with 3 being considered the level of proficiency. The state of Arizona requires a minimum of two formal observations for teacher evaluations, which should include a pre- and post-conference to discuss details of instruction. As part of the grant, AESA assigned

peer teachers to school sites to assist with instructional evaluations. The TOI is administered once per quarter, four times a year.

This evaluation tool was funded through a five-year Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. Districts implementing TOI have demonstrated low-student achievement scores and many students have not achieved state standards in reading and mathematics on AIMS, the current Arizona yearly assessment to measure student proficiency. Additionally, the districts in this program are considered "high-need" by having 50% or more of their student population enrolled in free or reduced price lunch programs.

TOI in District ABC

At the onset of this research, the Arizona Department of Education determined that District ABC had not met AYP within the last three years. AESA had partnered with some restructuring school districts to administer their comprehensive evaluation tool, TOI. Therefore, District ABC was currently in the process of restructuring some of their instructional practices with Arizona Education Services Agency (pseudonym).

ABC School District utilized this evaluation tool in the year 2012-2013, and it was administered to both teachers and principals to calibrate their performance level. The teachers were evaluated four times each school year using the Instructional Observation Tool. Because the TOI is an accountability tool, a broad explanation of this system was necessary to comprehend the philosophy and evaluation rubrics that were new to this district.

This new evaluation instrument was more comprehensive than the prior devices used in the past within this district. There were multiple sections that measured teachers' performances with some areas unfamiliar to teachers. The Arizona Education Service

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Agency (pseudonym) provided their own evaluators to administer this tool during teacher observations at District ABC. These peer evaluators performed both pre- and post-conferences with teachers, in addition to conducing the formal observation. In summation, this new protocol to evaluate teachers was not customary to teachers in this district.

Arizona English Language Learner Models

As previously noted, many urban school districts incorporated a high population of English Language Learners. An analysis in 2005 by the Urban Institute revealed that Limited English Proficiency (LEP) elementary school students are largely concentrated in common areas. Nearly 70% of the nation's LEP students are enrolled in only 10% of the schools, which are predominately located in urban areas. The institute's research also showed that LEP students are largely minority and economically disadvantaged.

In Arizona, the parameters for teaching English Language Leaners have undergone several transformations with their policies. The current Structured English Immersion (SEI) model ultimately resulted from the outcome of the Flores Consent Order issued by Federal District Judge Marquez. The order was an outgrowth of the *Flores v. Arizona* in 1992 and Proposition 203, which is a voter initiative that mandated English-only instruction. Both the Consent Order and the English-Only instructional initiative were mandated in 2000 (Davenport, 2008). The Consent Order laid the foundation for the Stanford English Language Proficiency (SELP) classification process for ELL students in 2006. And the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA), the current language assessment document, then replaced the SELP. Hence, the current SEI model,

which stipulates that schools provide ELL students with structured English instruction, evolved from both judicial orders and legislation.

This four hour English Language Development (ELL) block model in Arizona requires ELL students to receive daily language services. This type of language immersion program is based on an assumption that ELL students can achieve proficiency in English within one to two years. ELL classrooms are structured as English-only instructional environments, but have some variations based on student language capabilities. The SEI model requires ELLs to be grouped based on their English language proficiency with a designated block of time set to receive additional language instruction (Bunch, 2009). In order to graduate from an ELL classroom, students must achieve *mastery* of English at the student's grade level. Mastery in Arizona is measured by the state's English language proficiency test, the Arizona English Language and Literacy Assessment (AZELLA).

However, many teachers are concerned about separating ELL students from their non-ELL peers. In a 2010 study in Arizona, Rios-Aguilar, González-Canche, & Mol found that 85% of teachers felt that dividing ELL students from their English-speaking peers was actually counterproductive to their learning (Figure 2). Over half of teachers surveyed who instructed non-native speakers felt that ELL students' self-esteem was compromised from being pulled from regular classes and that their peers stereotyped these students. These teachers felt that these were negative experiences for ELL students due to this instructional separation.

How concerned are you that ELL students are pulled out of regular classes?

13% — No concern
32% — Somewhat concerned
27% — Very concerned
28% — Extremely concerned
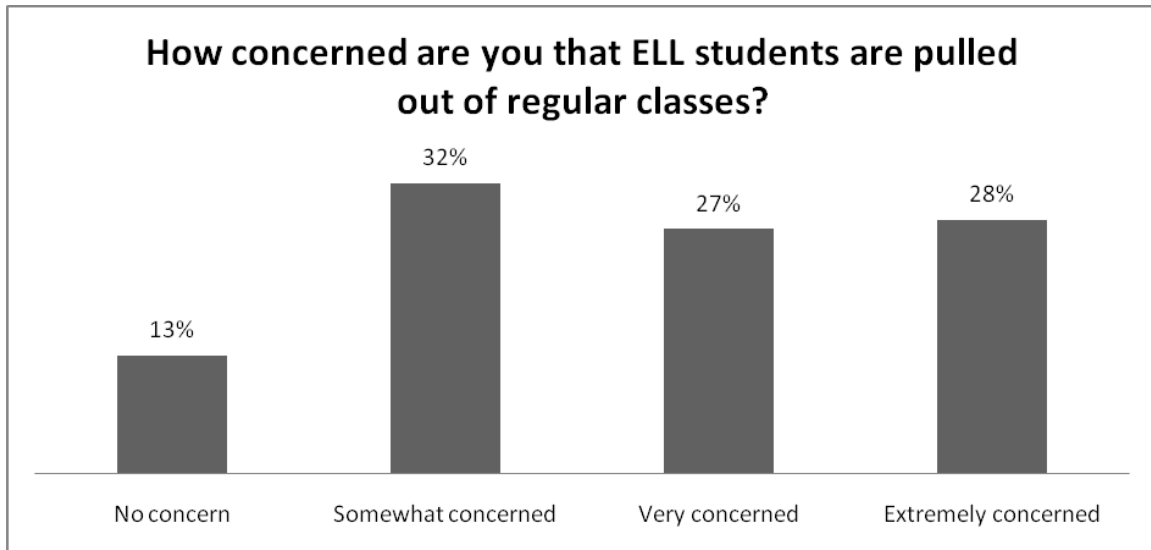
Figure 2. Concerns about pulling out ELL students from regular classes. Adapted from *A Study of Arizona's Teachers of English Language Learners* (Report for the UCLA Civil Rights Project), by C. Rios-Aguilar, M. González-Canche, & L. Moll, 2010. Available at http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/language-minority-students/a-study-of-arizonas-teachers-of-english-language-learners/rios-aguilar-arizonas-teachers-ell-2010.pdf)

High Stakes Testing

High stakes testing has played the biggest role thus far in educational accountability. The obvious goal of both federal and state high-stakes testing policies is to improve schools and ultimately student achievement. It is now common that the results of many tests are widely available and often conveyed through the media. Some in education have theorized that the rationale to publicize results will ameliorate future academic performances. The assumption was that teachers and students in low performing schools would work harder to effectively increase achievement (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012).

The practice of standardized testing in education can be traced back as far as the 1800s (Tyack, 1974) and became a common practice for most urban schools since the

1970s (Haertel & Herman, 2005). These tests have been used to reward and sanction teachers based on student results. The development of standardized tests is seen as a valid and reliable measurement of educational quality (Linn, 2005). However, some studies now question their effectiveness as tools to increase student achievement. Exit interviews with recent graduates have revealed that these types of standardized tests provided little to no impact on their achievement over time (Reardon, Arshan, Atteberry, & Kurlaender, 2010). Additionally, the goal to close achievement gap between income classifications and between racial and ethnic groups, which was one of the goals under NCLB, has been only marginally effective thus far (Reardon, 2011).

<center>**Issues Common to Urban Schools**</center>

Low Socio-economic Status

Urban schools are located in major cities; hence the cost of living in these areas is typically higher than rural areas or even some suburban areas. In the United States educational systems, 31% of all students attend schools in urban areas. Urban schools characteristically enroll higher rates of immigrant and diverse students. These diversities may include ethnic, racial, linguistic, and even religious distinctions in populations. Also, because of this diversity in students, there are usually more specific needs to contend with such as poverty, limited English proficiency, and student mobility (Krantzler & Terman, 1997).

Children that live in urban areas are much more prone to be living in poverty than children in other communities. In 1990, 20% of children nationwide were living in poverty. However, 30% of children living in urban areas lived in poverty. This number was significantly higher when compared to the 13% of children living in suburbs and

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22% of those living in rural areas (Krantzler & Terman, 1997). Yet in 2010, of the 72 million children under age 18 in the United States, 44% or 31.9 million were from low-income families. The federal poverty level was calculated at $22,350 for a family of four and 15.5 million families fell into this category according to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2010. Noticeably the issue of poverty has increased over the past 30 years. Figure 3 indicates the children comprise the largest age group living at the poverty level, which can create strains at the school level.

Family income by age, 2010

Poor   Near poor   Above low income

Less than age 18: 21% | 22% | 56%
Low income 44%

Age 18–64: 14% | 19% | 67%
Low income 33%

Age 65+: 9% | 25% | 66%
Low income 34%

0   20   40   60   80   100
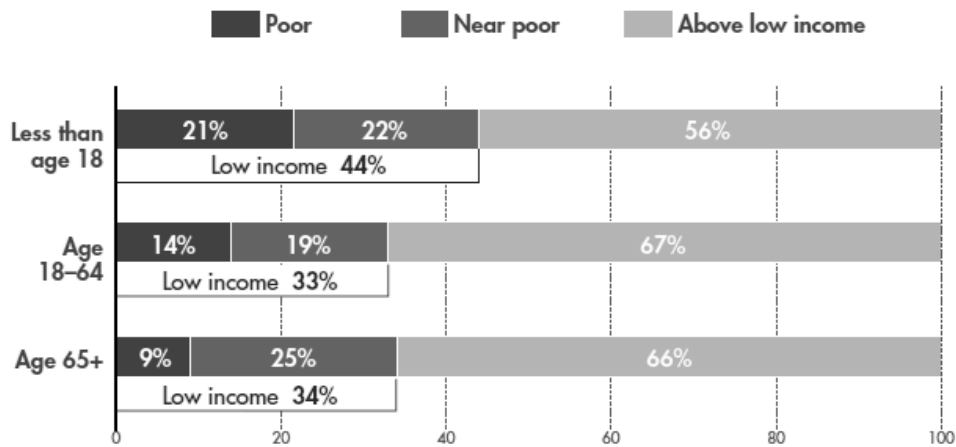
Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Figure 3. Income levels of poverty. Adapted from *Basic Facts About Low-income Children, 2010: Children Ages 6 Through 11,* by S. D. Addy and V. Wright, 2010, Columbia University, New York, NY.

One predictor of student poverty is the measurement of a school's lunch program. Schools with more than 40% of the students who qualify for reduced-price lunches or free lunch are considered to have a high concentration of poverty. Approximately, 40% of urban students attend schools that have high concentrations of poverty. This weighty issue for urban schools is considerably higher than the 10% of suburban students and

25% of rural students who attend similar types of schools (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2004).

Berliner associated the issue of poverty as the "600 pound gorilla" that affects American

education today, yet fails to be effectively addressed (2006). Poverty in schools is a major

factor associated with student underachievement. In fact, according to Krantzler and

Terman (1997), the "relationship between school poverty concentrations and school

academic achievement averages is stronger than the relationship between individual

family poverty and individual student achievement" (p. 134).

Poverty is strongly associated with race and ethnicity. Consequently, African-

American and Hispanics have the largest representation in urban areas that experience

serious poverty (Berliner, 2006). Arizona has a higher than average rate of poverty for

children, especially in the rural areas. Figure 4 shows that more than one quarter of urban

Arizona children live below the poverty level with percentages steadily increasing.

TOTAL POPULATION IN URBAN ARIZONA UNDER 18 2009	BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT CHANGE SINCE 2008	PERCENT CHANGE SINCE 2007
840,531	229,512	27.3	+3.5	+5.0

Figure 4. Child poverty in urban Arizona. Adapted from *Design and Methodology: American Community Survey.* Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/acs/www/methodology/methodology_main/

High ELL Population

Schools have an increasing rate of students who are non-English speakers. In

1999, studies revealed that 17% of Americans ranging from 5 to 24 years of age came

from families whose primary language was not English. Spanish was the primary

language spoken in 65% of these families (Slavin & Cheung, 2005). Urban public

schools have higher proportions of students with limited-English proficiency for this

reason. In 1993–1994, according to Krantzler and Terman (1997) urban schools had two

times the proportion of students with limited-English proficiency than the national

average. Consequently, students with limitations of the English language require

additional support in the educational system.

More recent data show this language barrier increasing. The number of children

between 5–17 who are non-native English speakers at home rose from 4.7 to 11.2 million

between 1980 and 2009, which is an increase from 10 to 21%.

> In 2009, some 21 percent of children ages 5-17 (11.2 million) spoke a language other than English at home, and 5 percent (2.7 million) spoke English with difficulty. Seventy-three percent of those who spoke English with difficulty spoke Spanish. (Planty et al., 2009)

The states with the highest percentages of non-native English speakers were Arizona,

New York, Nevada, Texas, and California, with Arizona hovering at 6% of the

population as shown in Figure 5. These statistics translate to schools that there is a

sizeable need for students to receive the ELL 4-hour language acquisition block.
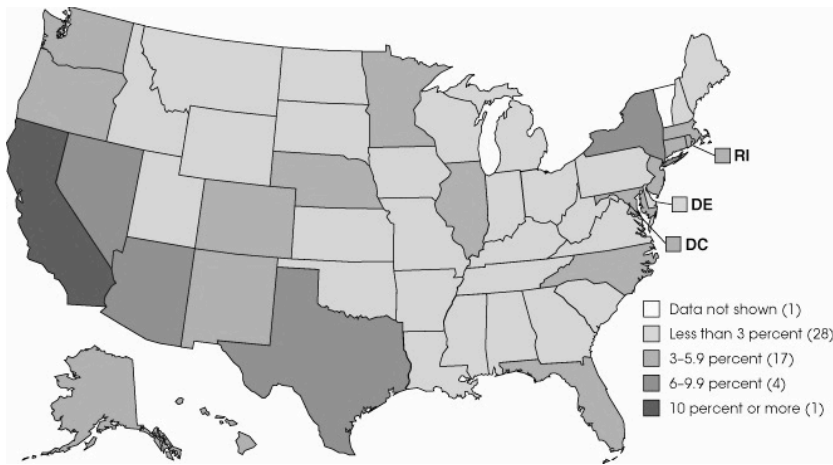
Figure 5. . States with the highest percentages of non-native English speakers. Adapted from *The Condition of Education,* by Institute of Education Sciences, 2010. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_lsm.asp

Student Mobility

Children living in urban areas tend to change schools more frequently than other children for several reasons. Oftentimes, low-income families will change schools in hopes of seeking a better education for their children. However, high mobility can harm a child's education in many ways. There is a greater chance for students to fall below grade level in reading and math and to may even need to repeat a grade due to frequent school changes (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2004).

Housing instability is a continuing problem for low-income families. According to data collected by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics in 2009, nearly 50% of households with children experience some type of housing concern. These trepidations include housing that is physically lacking in size or of substandard quality. Steadily increasing housing costs also contribute to mobility. Since 1978, the percentage of households paying more than half their income for housing has increased from 6 to 16%. In 15 states, more than 20% of children under age 6 live in households that spend more than half their income on rent.

Additionally, a recent downturned economy has created a surge in foreclosures. With more foreclosure displacements, the need for temporary housing has placed a burden on extended families. Housing costs have risen sharply in some of the most populated states. The change in housing trends has pushed many low-income families into an expensive rental market. On average, families below the poverty line spend more than 30% of household income on housing costs (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2009). These additional costs contribute to the housing migration of families living in poverty.

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In general, the population in the United States is considered a mobile society (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Although the rates of mobility have decreased slightly in recent years, approximately 40 million people in the United States, which is roughly 14% of the population, moved between 2002 and 2003. Around 24% of this migratory group, were found to be living below the poverty level. It is not surprising then that the movement for this low-income group translates into high rates of school mobility for children (Roy, Maynard, & Weiss, 2008). Foreclosures and even unemployment have generated swells of homelessness for many impoverished families. This increase in mobility has stressed the school systems in their ability to support children in these circumstances (Eckholm, 2009).

High Teacher Turnover

Staffing urban schools with effective teachers remains a challenge for many inner city districts (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009). A large number of teachers in urban districts tend to leave high-poverty schools that serve minority low-income students and move to schools in the suburbs comprised of wealthier and higher achieving students (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). This perpetual cycle generates recruitment issues for urban districts.

This high rate of turnover for urban districts comes at a price. High rates of turnover among teachers in high-poverty schools are part of the reason for the inequitable distribution of qualified teachers. Ingersoll (2004) found that high-poverty schools in urban communities lose approximately 22% of their teachers each year on average. These teachers that leave high poverty schools are nearly twice the national rate compared to the

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turnover rate in low-poverty schools. This type of exodus adds to the large quantity of inexperienced teachers in these urban schools.

High turnover rates are of concern not only because they may be an indicator of underlying problems in schools, but also because they can be disruptive to the school community and performance outcomes. Guin (2004) showed that teacher turnover has a negative effect on the school community. In her study, she found evidence that the level of staff connectedness is related to student engagement and achievement (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). According to Bryk and Schneider (2003), the relationships of trust between teachers, and between teachers and students, can be a predictor of student achievement. Rothman's (2001) study found that teachers in urban and low-income areas lacked fundamental content knowledge Therefore when teachers leave schools, these working relationships and familiar arrangements are altered.

Summary

An overview of the literature pertaining to stress, educational urban settings, and recent accountability policies and their implications are presented in this chapter. A synopsis of the background of stress, origination of stress, and coping strategies were shown to have negative consequences, especially as it pertains to teachers. The literature showed that teachers under stress could potentially have a negative affect on student achievement.

Studies also revealed that teachers in urban schools often face unique problems. Urban schools are known for high ethic populations with large groups of ELL students from low socio-economic neighborhoods. These circumstances commonly found in urban

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schools may create additional stress for teachers, especially when compounded. Also discussed were the current accountability policies that expose teachers to more scrutiny. New standards and evaluation instruments have stalwart expectations for teachers. Although the literature showed possible origins of stress, this study aimed to extend the research as to which stressors are currently prevalent for urban teachers with the expectation that district and schools use this research to affect changes that can either alleviate or compensate for high levels of stress in these schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the current stressors impacting teachers in an urban school setting. Results were compared and contrasted with prior research to view commonalities, yet more importantly to examine trends that teachers in urban schools associate with stress. An auxiliary outcome is to provide the district of study with the data so that possible solutions can be generated in order to lower or combat the stress levels of its teachers.

This chapter contains the research methods used to accomplish this study. This methodology section was divided into four sections composed of instrument creation, population surveyed, data collection, and the data analysis. The main focus of this research was to interview elementary teachers in an urban district concerning the origins of their occupational stress. The over-arching questions were:

1. What are the current sources of stress for urban elementary teachers?

2. Does stress impact urban elementary teachers?

3. What supports are needed to improve identified stressors?

As discussed in the literature review, teachers can affect student achievement. Stress levels of teachers can also impact their instructional levels in the classroom. As stated, long-term stress can affect both the psychological and physical well being of a person. This can lead to emotional distress and even bodily illnesses. Teachers under stress have and increased rate of absences, which disrupts the learning process. Teachers in urban districts have been found to leave schools at a higher rate when compared to their counterparts. This statistic is not optimal for students, as it takes time to acclimate

new teachers to the district, school, and classroom. Therefore, this study has important implications to report the findings of common stressors for urban teachers in order to begin the process of countering these indicators.

Design of Study

This research study utilized qualitative research to uncover stressors within an urban elementary school district. This study targeted teachers within a single elementary district to minimalize any extenuating outside factors or bias. The goal was to formulate a clear picture of current stressors based on the teacher responses. The research design consisted of three to four teachers in a focus group, where teachers were candid about their stress levels and the causes behind it.

This study utilized focus groups to obtain its qualitative data. The purpose of focus groups was to draw out respective attitudes, and personal experiences concerning causes of stress for classroom teachers. Focus groups were furthermore elected to gain information through an informal setting. By having lengthy, uninhibited discussions, teachers felt empowered to discuss their opinions on district polices and procedures. Morgan (1996) felt that this type of qualitative research is useful when issues involving authoritative influences of mutual interest for participants are discussed.

The focus groups consisted of several teachers from each site to create a small focus group. The 20 teachers chosen for this research were randomly selected to reflect a range of experience and grade level so that conclusions could be reliably generalized to all teachers in the district. The six questions were broadly open-ended to allow teachers the freedom to express their personal feelings and experiences that relate to the causes of their stress. However, there was a 5-point scale to each of the questions to indicate a level

of stress. In addition to the responses received, there was a brief questionnaire regarding demographics. The purpose of the demographics was to examine if there are any similarities or patterns to the interview responses when paired with information compiled on the demographic questionnaire. The questions for focus group panels are located in Appendix A.

Population Studied

The Arizona Education Service Agency, its acronym (AESA), the evaluation instrument (Teaching Observation Instrument), its acronym (TOI), and the name of the school district (District ABC) are pseudonyms. This study focused on the elementary teachers of a single district in a large urban setting. This population was drawn from ABC School District, which is located in the central Phoenix metropolitan area. It has ten schools, from pre-K through eighth grade. This area is considered to have a lower income status, as the district receives Title 1 funding and assistance. The median family income was $30,044 (Table 1) within the district boundaries, which was lower than the median income in 2010 for Maricopa County, which was $55,0534 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). A further breakdown of income levels for the district families is shown in Table 2.

Table 1

Statistics: General Income in District

Income group	Income levels
Per capita income	$9,357
Median family income	$30,044
Median male income	$16,962
Median female income	$12,892
Median income of a renter	$19,558
Median income of a homeowner:	$33,843

Note. Adapted from *Advance your teaching:*
Information from top schools, by Teachers' Salary
Info.com 2013. Retrieved from http://www.teachersalaryinfo.com/

Table 2

Household Income Levels

Income Level	# of families
10- 25k	3,890 families
25 - 40k	2,480 families
40 - 60k	1,855 families
60 - 100k	830 families
100k+	345 families

Note. Adapted from *Advance your teaching:*
Information from top schools, by Teachers' Salary
Info.com, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.teachersalaryinfo.com/

This study utilized nine elementary schools that included either a K-8 or a K-5

student population. The subsequent Table 3 outlines the current enrollment numbers

based on the June 2012 school board meeting. The district employs 390 certified

teachers; 348 of which service the elementary schools, and 31 administrators serve as

principals, assistant principals, or in other administrative capacities for the district. Total

enrollment at the end of June 2012 showed 7,093 students with 6,279 at the nine

elementary schools to be studied. Only classroom teachers were targeted for this study.

Table 3

ABC Elementary School Enrollment

ABC elementary schools	Student enrollment	Full-time certified teachers
School #1 (K-8)	777	44
School # 2 (K-5)	797	43
School # 3 (K-5)	389	23
School # 4 (K-8)	954	48
School # 5 (K-5)	559	34
School # 6 (K-5)	559	31
School # 7 (K-5)	765	39
School # 8 (K-5)	763	38
School # 9 (K-8)	716	41

Note. Taken from District ABC School Board minutes 6/14/12

The mobility for students for the population target district is shown in Table 3.

Since mobility is a prevalent issue in urban schools, it is necessary to indicate the trends

for students in District ABC as the data range from 2006 to 2010 indicates. One study

from the 1990s found that half of all students in the United States had moved at least

twice in the entire span of their educational years (Ross & Turner, 2005). A more recent

study found that as many as 20% of school-aged children moved within a one-year period (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2005). However, the data for student population in District ABC showed an even larger rate of mobility. As displayed, most mobility occurs within a one-year period with the majority of movement within the same geographical area. Research has indicated that high student mobility has an enhanced sense of disengagement that can negatively impact student achievement (Rivza & Teichler, 2007).

District ABC is located within the central Phoenix metropolitan area with 12 other elementary school districts that feed into Phoenix Union High School District and is shown in Table 4. This configuration of multiple feeder schools into a single high school district is a rather unique arrangement. Since so many districts within the urban surroundings exist, this hereby increases the possibility of migrating into different districts when changing residences.

Table 4

Student Mobility for Current Residence in ABC School District

Total:	9,435	+/-874
Same house 1 year ago	7,345	+/-763
Moved within same county	1,960	+/-574
Moved from different county within same state	20	+/-28
Moved from different state	30	+/-47
Moved from abroad	80	+/-79

Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2010
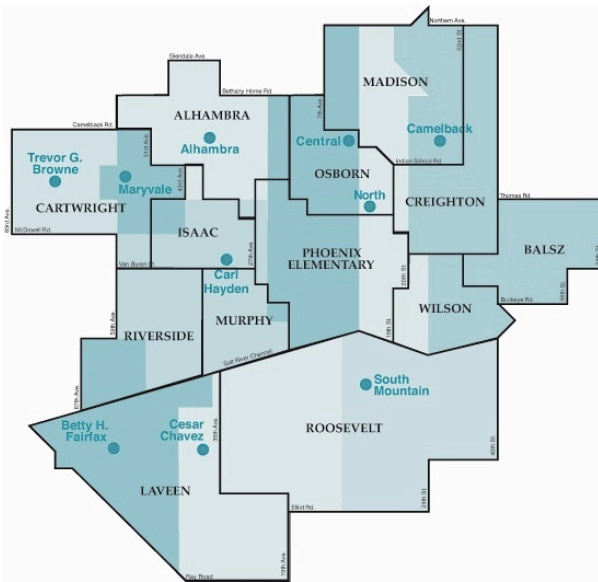
Figure 6. Map of Phoenix Elementary School Districts

Personnel Changes

Although public schools have made incremental changes to improve instruction in an equitable manner through formal initiatives, District ABC has more recently experienced several overt transformations that should be illustrated. There have been incremental changes within the organizational structure of this school district. At the onset of this research, the superintendent was in the middle of his first year as the district leader. There were other incremental changes beneath him, from personnel changes in his executive team to administrative modifications at school sites. And with new leadership, district policy and instructional transformations occurred. The culture of these schools may have experienced some adjustments as a result of these interpersonal changes.

New Evaluation Changes

The Arizona Education Service Agency, its acronym (AESA), the evaluation instrument (Teaching Observation Instrument), its acronym (TOI), and the name of the

school district (District ABC) are pseudonyms. One change that affected all teachers was the implementation of a new evaluation instrument. It is noted that District ABC utilized a different instrument for teacher observations and evaluations for the duration of this study. At the onset of this research, the Arizona Department of Education determined that ABC District had not met AYP within the last three years. Therefore, District ABC was currently in the process of restructuring some of their instructional practices with an Arizona Education Service Agency. AESA had partnered with some restructuring school districts to administer their comprehensive evaluation tool, Teaching Observation Instrument (TOI). This evaluation tool was funded through a five-year Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. Districts implementing TOI have demonstrated low-student achievement scores and many students have not achieved state standards in reading and mathematics on AIMS, the current Arizona yearly assessment to measure student proficiency. Additionally, the districts in this program are considered "high-need" by having 50% or more of their student population enrolled in free or reduced price lunch programs.

ABC School District initially utilized this evaluation tool in the year 2012-2013, and it was administered to both teachers and principals to calibrate their performance level. The teachers were evaluated four times each school year using this observation tool. Because this is an accountability tool, a broad explanation of this system is necessary to comprehend the philosophy and evaluation rubrics that will be new to this district.

This new evaluation instrument was more comprehensive than prior devices used in the past within this district. There were multiple sections that measured teachers'

performances with some areas unfamiliar to teachers. The Arizona Education Service Agency (pseudonym) provided their own evaluators to administer this tool during teacher observations at District ABC. These peer evaluators performed both pre- and post-conferences with teachers, in addition to conducing the formal observation. In summation, this new protocol to evaluate teachers was lengthy and uncustomary to teachers in this district.

Significance of Changes

These instrumental changes within personnel and the new evaluation tool were both powerful shifts that could influence the population of this study through the shift in culture. In general, culture is shaped through interactions with others and through personal reflections (Finnan, 2000). School culture develops through interactions with colleagues, students, and the community. In this study, many shifts have transpired within the interactions between new staff or within the community, which in this case has occurred through the new evaluators. Therefore, compelling cultural shifts can impact behavior among many members of the school.

<div align="center">

Data Collection

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Prior to beginning the study, permission was first sought at the district level. Once approval was obtained from District ABC's associate superintendent (Appendix B), the next step involved acquiescence from school site administration. Site principals were then contacted to obtain permission to use their sites for the purpose of interviews within the focus groups. The principal letter, found in Appendix C, explained the significance and design of the study.

Participants then were arbitrarily invited to participate in this research. Although teachers were randomly chosen at individual school sites, there were two groups segregated by grade levels. Group 1 consisted of teachers in Grades 3 through 5, and Group 2 was comprised of teachers in Grades 6 through 8. There were four focus groups with five teachers per group. Teachers were then contacted through email to finalize focus group meeting sites. In order to further entice teachers to participate and thereby increase the rate of participation, a gift card with $5 monetary value was offered at the conclusion of the focus group. This procedure was based on the work of Szelenyi, Bryant, and Lindholm (2005), who found that prepaid monetary incentives enhanced response rates.

Once chosen, the participants for the focus groups helped establish the meeting sites based on availability and accessibility. Interviewees were provided a concise written explanation concerning the purpose of this study with the consent form. Participants were informed that their responses would be recorded and that their answers were a part of an investigative research (see Appendix D). Additionally, participants were informed that identities would remain concealed throughout the focus groups sessions and that they would remain anonymous in the final public document as well. Participants were likewise encouraged to keep all responses within the sessions confidential.

Before beginning the discussions, basic expectations and protocol were established. The moderator placed participants into semi-circle formation giving each person a number between 1 and 5. These numbers were assigned to comply with anonymity and to address participants in an orderly manner. By numbering the participants, note taking was organized by question and answers. During the focus

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groups, interviews were recorded and later transcribed for further review. The numbering system also helped to simplify identification of participants in the transcripts. Participants were additionally reminded about the purpose of the study and were informed of the interview standard procedures.

In order to maintain complete confidentiality, the following safeguards were used to ensure the security and privacy of all participants in the study: All participants were identified through a numbering system only for use throughout the study; Audio recordings used in this study will be destroyed upon completion of research; and all responses, both audio recordings and written transcriptions were stored in a secure location.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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All recorded interviews were transcribed and reassigned an identification number. During the interview process, participants were assigned a number from 1 to 4 within a particular focus group. Data from the interview transcripts were reorganized from individual focus groups that were originally labeled *Focus Group 1-Teacher 1* to a new numbering system. Teachers were reassigned a number from 1 to 20 by eliminating the group affiliation altogether. The purpose for the change was to remove any identification duplication; these numbers were reorganized to reflect the participants in the order that the interview occurred. The new numbering system also included the question and demographic data as well. For example, the first participant's identification number for the first question was coded 1.1.3.7. This system of identification provided participant, question, grade level, and years of experience. This method of documentation provided key data throughout all aspects of analysis.

The initial analysis began by looking across the data chronologically to get a rich description and understanding of what was said in the interviews. Transcriptions were viewed for responses to similar sources of stress on multiple levels. Responses were further broken down and catalogued by specific questions. Using the grounded theory, data from the focus groups were meaningfully analyzed and coded for context similarities.

After multiple examinations, the information was chunked into conceptual categories through the open coding process. Responses were first viewed as large categories and narrowed by more specific areas of concern. Upon closer scrutiny, subcategories emerged through the axial coding process. By using the grounded theory, the data provided a means of examining responses on multi-tiered echelons for in-depth analysis and a structure to view common relationships.

Once the establishment of the conceptual framework was created; the development of a systemic coding system within the analytic software program was created. In addition to the comprehensive identification system, the analytic program allowed for the formation of key descriptors for discrete data sets. The descriptors for this study were the two areas of demographic data: grade level and level of experience. These descriptors could then be isolated to review relationships between the participants and the categories.

In order to examine the interview response data from multiple vantage points, the data were delineated with Dedoose, an online research tool. This program helped facilitate additional exploration of the data from multiple perspectives with sophisticated efficiency and graphic representations for distinctive conclusions. After the initial

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analyses of results were formulated through the grounded theory, data were transmitted into Dedoose for further examination.

Additionally, the codes that emerged during preliminary analysis were uploaded into the website by categories and subcategories. The transcript data were then uploaded into the website with the revised identification system. The first question was omitted from the analytic software tool because it only related to demographics. Transcripts were then assigned to the corresponding teacher and the precise question for a total of 100 excerpts. Responses were subsequently linked individually to open and axial codes within the software program. Excerpts from the transcripts were then linked to multiple codes as dictated by the extent of the individual responses. This coding process directly connected these excerpts to a core concept, while quantitative measuring the responses for each question.

Participants' input was then analyzed for each question by isolating the data sets. Each set of data was analyzed at the individual grade levels and at the level of experience. By isolating the data, the magnitude of responses could be viewed at both levels for each category and subcategory. Through the process of triangulating the data through each participant, the response excerpt, and the demographics, the results could be examined for connections and significance. The magnitude of responses provided clarity to the areas of stress for various subgroups that were later transferred into observable graphs for comparison. Complete findings were reported in Chapter 4 of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This research investigated the stress levels of elementary teachers in an urban district. As shown in Chapter 2, stress is attributed to both physiological and psychological difficulties and has been linked to occupational disengagement, which can be counterproductive in education. This study not only sought to find current causes of stress for urban teachers, but to also present solutions to some controllable issues from a teacher's perspective. The driving questions were three-fold: What are the current sources of stress for urban elementary teachers? Does stress impact urban teachers? and What supports are needed to improve identified stressors? This chapter describes the results from the focus group interviews systematically through common themes and storylines.

The design process included interviewing teachers from one urban school district within small focus groups. Interviews consisted of questions concerning causes and levels of stress. After themes were developed using the grounded theory, the data were uploaded into an online analysis site, Dedoose. This analysis tool assisted with the breakdown of the qualitative data through features such as content analysis using interview excerpts and codes. This program helped explore patterns within coded excerpts under multiple lenses. Also included in this chapter were the demographics of the participants, a recap of how the interviews were administered, and an in-depth examination of the data and common relationships. As stated in Chapter 3, teachers were asked to speak candidly about occupational stress within a focus group setting at several different school sites. The interview questions are listed below for reference:

1. What grade do you teach and how many years of teaching experience do you have?

2. Thinking back over your teaching career, what have been some of the sources of stress in the past

3. What are the current sources of stress in your work?

4. How does the district or school site provide support for the factors that are causing stress for teachers?

5. If you were in a position to develop or recommend strategies for supporting teachers and alleviating their stress, what would you do?

6. If you were to assign a value, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how would you rate your current level of stress?

Participants

The 20 teacher participants from four different schools were evenly divided into two separate grade bands. One set of ten teachers taught Grades 3 through 5, and the other set of 10 participants taught Grades 7 through 8. The focus groups were assembled to discuss six open-ended questions, with the first question directed at establishing demographics. Interview times ranged in length from a concise 20-minute session to as long as 90 minutes. The experience level varied among grade levels, with a span from 1 year to 26 years. However, there were a high proportion of participants that had taught less than five years. The majority of teachers in this study were female, which aligns with the U.S. national averages of 76% of public teachers being female. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). A full breakdown of participant demographics is shown in (Table 5).

Table 5

Demographics of Participants

_____

	Quantity	Percentage
Gender		
Female	15	75
Male	5	25
Years of experience		
1-2 years[a]	8	40
3-5 years[b]	4	20
6-10 years	5	25
11-20 years	2	10
20 + years	1	5
Grade level		
3rd grade	3	15
4th grade	5	25
5th grade	2	10
7th grade	3	15
8th grade	7	35

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[a]60% of participants have < 5 years experience; $n = 20$; [b]60% of participants have < 5 years experience; $n = 20$

Teacher Population

For this study, focus groups were administered at five of the ten schools in District ABC. As the sample size was analyzed, it was important to note that there was a large quantity of new teachers within this study. As shown in Table 5, the percentage of new teachers with 1 to 2 years of experience was 40%. By comparing the population

sample to national and Arizona statistical data from the 2009 National Center for

Educational Statistics publication, experience levels of teachers within this district for

this study was lower. Although the averages were comparable for the experience level of

3 to 9 years, there was a large discrepancy with the least and most experienced teacher

levels (see Table 6).

Table 6

Years of Full-time Teaching Experience

Years of experience	National averages	Arizona averages	District ABC averages
< 3 years	13%	21%	40%
3-9 years	34%	35%	35%
10-20 years	29%	26%	20%
> 20 years	24%	18%	5%

Note. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public Teacher Questionnaire," 2007-08.

Emerging Themes

Using the grounded theory process, analysis resulted in emerging themes. After

each question was transcribed and organized, the open coding process revealed

commonalities throughout various levels of the data. Through multiple review sessions of

responses for all questions, the four central themes that the participants found as primary

stressors were *support, workload, curriculum,* and *students.* However upon further

analysis of detailed responses, subcategories emerged for each of the major themes as

shown in Figure 7. Through the breakdown of individual questions and passages, each

category was further developed with clarification of detailed responses that demonstrated the primary stressors for teachers of this district.
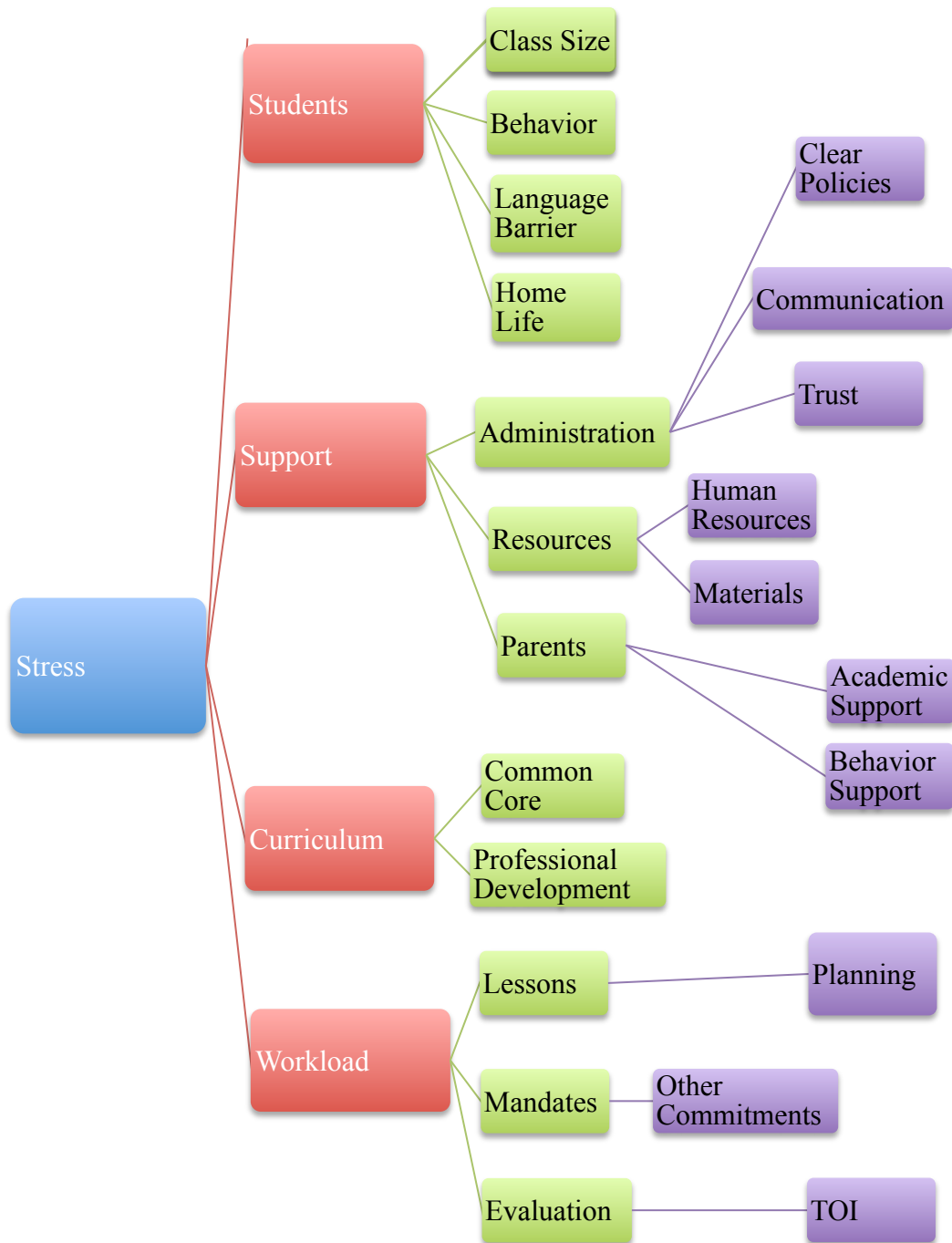
Figure 7. Major and minor themes

The results of this study were broken down into two parts. Part 1 of the results section describes the stressors for the teachers in this urban district. These areas corresponded with the comments from Question 2, Question 3, and Question 6. Responses from teachers explored past stressors, followed by the teachers' comments about current stressors, and closed with the most recent highest stressor of each teacher in this study. Components of this section utilized the excerpts from the interviews to conceptualize the four themes. Based on participants' answers, subthemes surfaced within the major themes. Teacher responses were also examined by frequency analysis at both the different grade levels and experience level, which demonstrated observable patterns. Finally, the responses regarding how stress impacts teachers was disaggregated and analyzed. The inclusive data was compared to past studies for teachers' stress, and assessed for further recommendations in Chapter 5.

The second part of the results section incorporated the participants' responses about programs or policies that can lessen stress for teachers. The results of these sections were connected to the responses from Question 4 and Question 5. Half of these comments focused on the current ways that District ABC helped alleviate stress for its teachers, and the other component revealed the responses from the teachers' perspectives. All responses amalgamated the central themes as portrayed in Part 1 of the results section. Lastly, the suggestions were compared to existing research of known stressors in urban schools. Any recommended changes were discerned through effective change models for viable solutions that could lessen the stress of urban elementary teachers in the final chapter of the study, as well as any recommendation for further studies.

Part 1: Stressors for Urban Teachers

The open-ended questions were geared towards uncovering stressors of the past and present with the discussion of ways to alleviate stress in urban schools in the future. Question 2 aimed to identify the stressors from past experiences in the classroom. Of the 20 participants, 5 of the participants had only one year of experience and two teachers declined to answer this question. These two teachers justified their refusal to address the first question based on the fact that this was their first of teaching and they did not have any prior data to contrast. Through analysis of responses, participants' answers were linked to the four main themes and subsequent themes. The majority of teachers pointed chiefly to the lack of *support* as their biggest stressor. *Workload* came in as the next biggest stressor, followed by *curriculum*, with *students* narrowly trailing as shown in Figure 8.
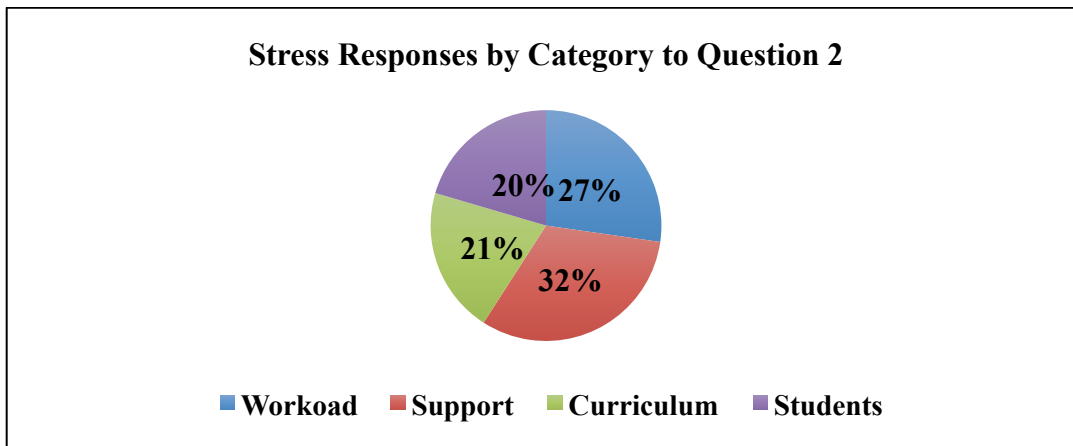
Figure 8. Stress responses by category to Question 2

Question 3 probed participants about their stress triggers in an urban elementary district. All 20 participants responded to these questions. Teachers again indicated the category *support* as the main stressor. Participants designated *workload* as the second

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highest category, followed by *students* with *curriculum* in the final place within the key themes as shown in Figure 9. It was notable that the category for *lack of support* was the most prominent category for teachers' stress again with identical percentages to the responses from Question 2. The category of *workload* had only a 2% increase in overall responses for stress, while *curriculum* and *students* had a reversal of order in ranking, where teachers found *students* to be more tense as a current stressor.
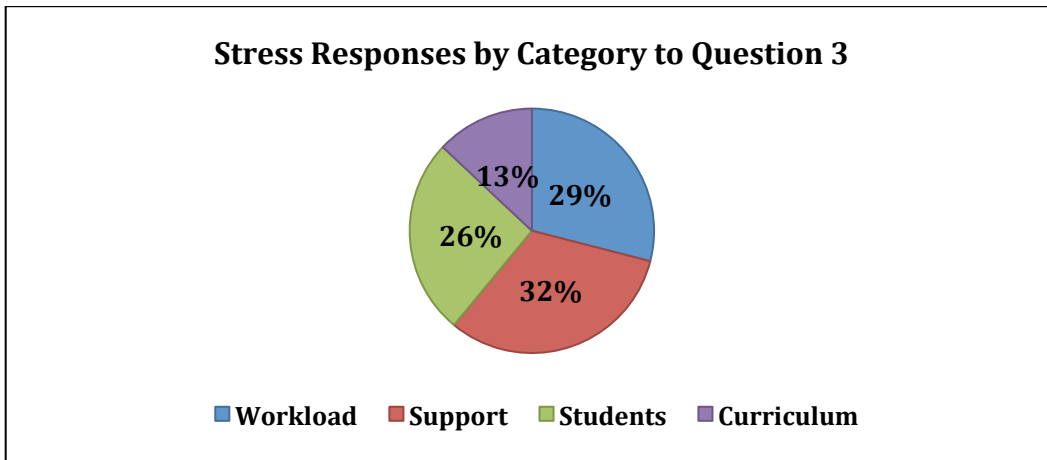
Figure 9. Stress responses by category to Question 3

The results from the first two questions were grouped together for data analysis because there were a high percentage of first-year teachers. The data were expounded initially by themes. The largest category for both questions was *support* and was disaggregated by subcategories and supported by individual teacher excerpts. Next, responses were viewed by frequency for individual grade levels, or grade bands. And finally, levels of experience were broken down by the participants' answers.

Support

The *support* category or theme proved to be the area for the majority of stressors by participants throughout this study. Although labeled *support,* teachers depicted this

area that demonstrated a lack of support. This central theme encompassed strong

sentiment that participants identified as a substantial contributor to their stress levels.

However, when further breaking down the responses, several subcategories emerged

within this theme. The two largest subthemes under *support* were the lack of

administrative support and inadequate resources. In general, teachers stated that both of

these subthemes were crucial areas that comprised the foundational structure in which to

perform their teaching duties. Although not as prominent, there was a third subtheme for

support that included absent parental support. Teachers stated that the lack of support

from parents played a role as a stressor.

   The subcategories likewise had ancillary themes. Under lack of *support* under

administration, these subthemes emerged: *clear policies, communication,* and *trust.* Many

teachers at the middle school level indicated a lack of professional support by

administration in this area. Other teachers stated that they were confused or unaware of

policies, duties, and deadlines that were part of their responsibilities as teachers. And

although student discipline itself is chiefly sited under the *students* category, many

participants cited lack of clear polices or inadequate support that placed their concerns

under this theme as well.

   Additionally, teachers felt stress due to inadequate resources that were needed for

the function of their job. Within this subtheme, participants responded that stress was

related to either the lack of material resources, or the lack of human resources, namely

personnel. References to lack of material resources included supplies related to clerical or

instructional support. Teachers also responded that there was a great need for additional

personnel to help support students. Positions included in this category were special

education teachers, para-professionals, and *other supporting personnel*. However, within the subcategory of *Human Resources,* some participants cited a lack of support with colleagues at times. The diagram in Figure 10 delineated the category of *support*.
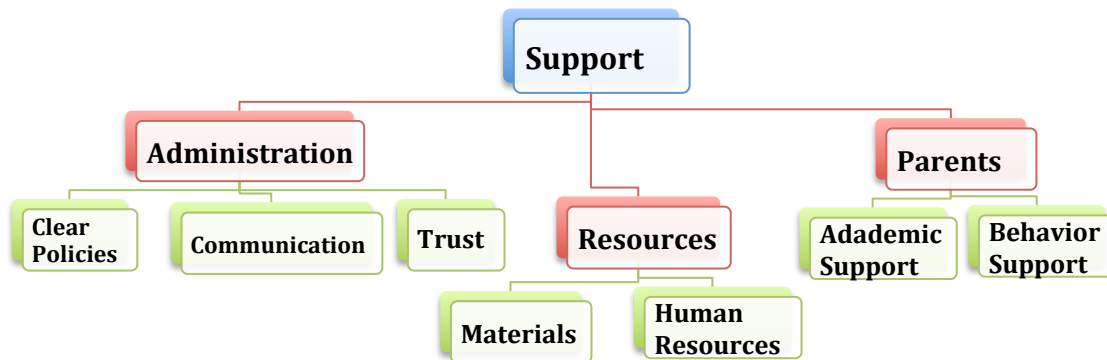
Figure 10. Diagram of support categories

Lack of administrative support: Policies. One subcategory under administration where teachers stated support was missing involved *policies.* Responses from both Question 2 and Question 3 had clear opinions about specific policies, or their lack of. Some of the examples identified in this study related to several safety concerns. Again, multiple middle school teachers expressed additional concern for missing policies in the schools. One middle school teacher stated, "There is a miscommunication with the administration about procedures, so it could be something like not knowing what the fire drill procedure is, but [we] want to have a fire drill." [1]

There were several teachers who claimed that unclear administrative policies were stressful. Other replies further indicated that concise procedures were absent within the schools. Another MS teacher commented on a problem within her school site:

[1] DISCLAIMER: All quotations within this study are in the words of the participants.

> Pretty much we have to assume at all times that we are completely on our own and that we need to completely control everything that happens in our classroom, and even outside of our classroom. Even in the hallways, the bathrooms; none of that is ever managed by anybody in the school. We are completely responsible to make sure that kids are safe and to make sure that kids are learning and everything. I mean there's just no support.

This large concern came from MS teachers concerning the lack of procedures pertaining to student behavior. Several respondents collaborated that more often than not, there was no assistance from administration when it came to controlling disruptive student behavior. Teachers reported assaults on other students and on other teachers with no aid from school administration. Many in the focus groups reiterated that although there may be a written plan for the schools, it was not enforced and that many teachers were on their own for much of the student behavioral problems, which was quite stressful. Behavior infractions disrupted and interrupted the learning environment.

Lack of administrative support: Communication. The second subcategory under *lack of administrative support* that emerged from the focus groups concerned *insufficient communication.* Under this theme, missing communication from administration permeated into other areas that were not exclusively tethered to one category. Some teachers concurred that due to the omission of procedures, many felt that the responsibilities typically under administrative jurisdiction became another burden the teachers. This was especially a significant stressor for the less experienced teachers. One response from a less experienced middle school teacher reported that not only was there a problem with the *clarity of policies* but that also administration did not seek input for solutions to these issues. Another middle school teacher stated,

> I feel very frequently that decisions and just happenings and procedures are—give our input into how we think that things should be in the school or how procedures

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should be run. And secondly, I just feel like we just never quite know what's going on.

The middle school teachers in this study had additional stress issues with administration, especially in the areas of clear policies and the communication of those policies. However, one third grade teacher answered that although she understood the policies, there were frequent changes occurring:

> But some of the things that have frustrated me—and I've worked in this district my whole teaching career, so that's where I'm going with this—it's just that they [school] don't seem to stick with anything for very long. So that's a little bit frustrating. You never know if it would have worked, because I feel like they jump on [new] things. . . . So that's a little bit frustrating, it's just not giving programs a chance, I guess.

Lack of support: Trust. The third subtheme under administrative *support* that participants pointed out was the absence of trust. "I think my stress level this year has been more focused on the lack of transparency even more than the lack of communication," stated one of the seventh grade teachers. Her comments referred to the omission of straightforward policies at her school. The teacher stated that she experienced several different encounters with her administration when seeking answers for her situations or problems. She discovered that there were no definite procedures in place for her problems, nor were there viable resolutions offered to help find solutions.

An eighth grade teacher reported that she felt that her administration made decisions that affected many aspects of the school's function that were both counter-intuitive and erratic.

> I think some of the current stressors are that the administration at this school doesn't involve teachers very well in decision-making. So, decisions have been made that affect our day-to-day schedule and impact our students without our input. . . . Each year is so variable because of these types of decisions, where like staff has shifted, resources are redistributed, and then you don't know who your

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colleagues are going to be or what you're teaching or your team configuration. And so I think that's affected me negatively.

Another eighth grade teacher spoke of her situation upon returning to school after a leave of absence. She expressed that her feelings of self-worth as a professional evaporated when she was placed in a new educational setting without prior knowledge or discussion.

> I came back to a new administration. Not knowing my administration that well, and they not really knowing my skills and my abilities, they just threw me in a special's class. This change didn't really empower me to do what I was skilled at doing. They didn't really value me as a teacher in my eyes.

There were also two comments regarding administration and their treatment of staff members that compromised a level of subordinate trust. A seventh grade teacher explained her statement concerning the breach of confidentiality. "Also there's this really negative culture at our school where administrators talk about teachers incredibly negatively in front of their colleagues, and it has made me very reluctant to talk to my administrators at all." This teacher added that these types of comments have been made in front of students at times. She reported that some students asked her about things that they had heard about other staff members. Students have asked her, "Oh, you don't really like so-and-so, do you?" And the teacher replied to her students, "Of course I like them." She then stated that students had not asked her these types of questions in past years.

Lack of resource support: Materials. The second subtheme under *support* that teachers revealed as a source of stress was categorized in the area of resources. Teachers stated that they felt that there was a lack of resources that were necessary to function suitably in the classrooms. There were likewise subcategories under *resources*. Teachers said that they lacked materials, which in turn emerged as an ancillary category. Materials

for this study were defined as supplies or commodities utilized to perform the various tasks of a classroom teacher. Materials that were discussed in the focus groups incorporated basic supplies, such as paper; however, technological equipment was likewise grouped in this category. Stress was a concern due to a lack of these functional materials.

One seventh grade teacher described the time she needed a light bulb for her computer projector. She explained that the principal told her daily that he was going to fix it tomorrow. The word *tomorrow* was used every day for three weeks, which kept her from utilizing her computer for instruction. Finally, she purchased the materials and fixed the problem herself.

A third grade teacher explained that during her first year of teaching she was assigned three grade levels within the same classroom. She described that year as being extremely stressful due to lack of materials that were not supplied to her for multiple grade levels. In here words, *support* was "MIA" (missing-in-action) for both subcategories *administration* and *resources.*

Interestingly, all references to inadequate materials resources for Question 3 were from eighth grade teachers. The first comment for lack of resources directly referred to technological tools. One teacher stated that her SMARTboard was not functioning, while another cited a broken copy machine as the cause of her stress. Both teachers expressed extreme levels of stress for these situations, as it pertained to the function of their job directly.

Another response from a MS teacher stated that there was a disjunction with school expectations and the availability of materials. "I have a unit test and scoring

guides with no support." The fact that there are assumptions for instructional practices made prior to providing materials was unconscionable to this teacher.

Lack of resource support: Human Resources. There were also comments from participants regarding instructional support. Therefore, the subcategory of *Human Resources* was added. This subtheme under *materials* included participants' responses regarding a lack of support with instructional personnel or even colleagues. Teachers expressed their frustration and high stress levels due to the absence of classroom assistance for overcrowded classrooms. Five teachers expressed feelings of stress that their administration did not provide instructional interventionists or para-professionals that could assist with instruction. "And there's no support. It affects the students because you have a frustrated teacher that's getting upset at any and every little thing," a third grade teacher remarked. A final comment from this teacher summed it up, "I need help."

The study also revealed some tensions for participants amongst their colleagues. Participants cited support from colleagues as either a catalyst for stress for them, or that their high stress levels negatively impacted their ability to collaborate effectively. One seventh grade teacher expanded on the discussion about unprofessional conduct of discussing co-workers by administrators, and that these actions disseminated into some relationships with some colleagues.

> And then I think it's been just really uncomfortable in my relationships with colleagues, because I either know things about them that an administrator has said that I really shouldn't know, or I think that maybe there have been things said about me that I don't know about. That makes it really uncomfortable to have a relationship with my colleagues.

There were also comments about feelings of lowered efficacy toward colleagues and the collaborative process of teaching. A middle school teacher admitted her feelings

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and stated, "I think I have become a little bit jaded. I'm much less willing to do extra things that I have done in years past and I'm much more resistant to doing things if I don't think they are going to be effective." High stress levels also affected her performance during collaboration. A fourth grade teacher said that her stressful state of mind had adversely affected her contributions during team projects or instructional joint efforts.

> I would say my stress affects other teachers just when working them collaboratively. If I'm really stressed out and I'm allowing it to bother me, then it's—I'm not able to engage and put as much work into what we're doing as they are. And so if I'm allowing the stress to fester, then it hinders the amount of work we can get done.

Lack of Resource Support: Parents

The last area of stress under *resources* that emerged from teacher interviews was the absence of parental support. Teachers viewed parental support from two angles: academic support and behavioral support. It should be stated that although teachers felt that *parents* was a subcategory that caused stress at times, District ABC has continued to encourage parental involvement in student learning.

Two elementary teachers responded that parents have contributed to their stress. Parents were unsupportive of the teacher's requests to help with reinforcement of learning at home claimed a fifth grade teacher. She stated that some parents have refused to assist in the learning process and have shared these views with teachers.

> Parents are always upset for everything. They don't want homework; they don't want anything. They think we're not just teachers, but babysitters, nurses, and counselors, as well. And it's getting to the point that I'm getting the thought of continuing my education and getting out of teaching.

Support grade level frequency. For Questions 1 and 2, the main category, *support* (32% of all teachers' responses) proved to be the highest area of stress. The

responses were viewed for frequency by grade levels. The MS teachers reported more stress in this area totaling 74% of all comments, and eighth grade teachers alone claimed 33% of the total number of all responses. Upon further analysis, teachers responded that their most stressful area under *support* was the *lack of administrative support.* Administrative procedures, the communication of these procedures, and the implementation of these procedures caused the most misgivings for teachers in this subtheme.

Workload

The *workload* category received the second highest amount of responses from participants as an area of stress. When this category was broken down further, teachers pointed to the following subthemes under *workload*: *lessons, mandates,* and *evaluations*. The subcategory of *lessons* was primarily time constraints of instructional planning as indicated by teachers. Participants stated that lesson planning was one area that was difficult to manage due to time constraints with other pressing responsibilities. Teachers said that they were forced to complete lesson planning at home, which infringed upon their home life and oftentimes displaced rest and sleep.

Mandates were defined by the parameters of mandatory paperwork that must be completed by teachers or schools as outlined by the district. Paperwork included instructional forms, such as grades and other documents pertaining to a student's learning or personal information. Documents pertaining to Special Education were likewise placed in the category. Under this theme, the teachers described stress from excessive amounts of work that came under a teacher's job description. Many participants cited tasks that were often unfulfilled for lack of time. A general consensus for this category was that

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many tasks could not be completed and that they had to prioritize the most pressing needs as best they could. A feeling of overwhelming anxiety could be used as an alternate descriptor for this theme.

Lessons. Teacher responses across the grade levels for lesson planning were varied. There were some answers that were specific to lessons, which shaped the subcategory of *lessons*. Participants specified topics under this area ranged from differentiating lessons by ability to planning for multiple content subjects. Nonetheless, *time management* was a reoccurring theme where teachers felt stress. A third grade teacher explained her difficulty in creating diversified lessons: "It is stressful learning to work with so many different levels of learning and understanding; Going from someone in third grade who cannot read or write to someone who's way up there reading above the benchmark." She also found it difficult to balance the needs of her students' needs with her personal needs.

> I feel like if I had more time, I would be able to figure out those things more effectively. But I feel like time management in the classroom, outside of the classroom, I have no idea what to do with it, so that's a major stress.

Changes in the expectations of lesson expectations also caused stress for some participants. A seventh grade teacher stated that there was a new emphasis on the focus of her instruction, with little clarity. She indicated that last year the district changed the expectation for lesson planning and writing objectives.

> We are now supposed to be focusing on English language acquisition. We have our concept language objectives, and we have walkthroughs of people coming in from the district who are looking for certain things, but we never know exactly what they're looking for, and we hardly ever get feedback.

Middle school teachers were stressed over planning for multiple subject areas due to time constraints. An eighth grade teacher stated, "I'm someone who has always

planned for multiple content areas, which I can do in two or three work spurts. But after about two or three weeks, I just get really burnt out with planning for multiple contents." Additionally, she expressed feelings of ingratitude from her administrator through her comment, "Well, you're a teacher, so you can just teach stuff. And sort of that lack of respect for my position is really stressful."

Other teachers stated that their workload had increased over time. Past stressors that teachers cited were preparation and lesson planning. "When I was a younger teacher, it took me longer to plan, which ended up causing quite a bit of stress." The increased planning time has created a snowball effect in other areas of time management. A seventh grade teacher remarked,

> In addition to my lesson planning is the time it takes to grade . . . every assignment or test needs to be graded. I would spend literally an entire Saturday grading. I would just wake up early in the morning, and not stop grading until midnight or 1:00 at night. And for me that doesn't allow me to get rest, which I think contributes to my stress.

Participants answered some of the answers for Question 3 similarly to responses to Question 2 under the *planning* subcategory. The issue of time commitments was prevalent in many answers for both questions. "I think my current sources of stress come from just the amount of grading I have to do on a daily basis, with over 150 kids. Trying to keep up and give adequate feedback to every single kid is very tough," said one seventh grade teacher. Planning and grading difficulties at the middle school came up multiple times. "Just the fact that when you're operating on three hours of sleep, four hours of sleep because you were up making that lesson, or because you were up grading that paper," stated another seventh grade teacher.

Mandates. Teachers continued to comment on large amounts of paperwork that increased the timeframe for their occupational tasks, which were noted under the subcategory of *mandates*. The following excerpts described some personal stressors from the focus group interviews. One seventh grade teacher explained,

> You are so tired because you were up trying to figure out something extra that the school or the district gave you . . . or because you're trying to develop a procedure for your team because the school doesn't have one in place.

A second year middle school teacher described the lack of communication that involved the ELL students in her classroom. Her response indicated that she was not notified of the ELL status for some of her students prior to completing the required necessary documentation at the end of the year. She further elaborated her frustrations:

> We have moments where suddenly there are maybe 10 students in our class that are ELL that we never knew were ELL, but suddenly somebody just told us that they are classified as ELL students and now we need to write some ELL plans. Even though we are not ELL teachers, have not been ELL trained at all, and know nothing about or have never heard the term *ILP* before. So now I must attend a mandatory meeting tomorrow to learn how to write this plan, which is going to take me hours upon hours for 10 students that I didn't even know were ELL to begin with. Anyway, these plans are not due in a month, they're due *tomorrow* !

> Another teacher from the fifth grade referenced high amounts of paperwork that

consumed her time. She stipulated that the paperwork was not connected to instruction, yet she did not specify what the paperwork entailed either.

> So I guess for me, I do feel like I get bogged down with the paperwork; there's so much paperwork. And I would really rather spend my time just working on my lesson plans and getting my activities together for my kids and have a personal secretary to do all my paperwork. That would be awesome, so then I could just focus on my teaching.

A third grade teacher commented that there was so much that teachers do other than just *teaching.* She contributed her stress to extreme paperwork.

My stress has increased a lot. There is a lot of paperwork, a lot of things are due at the same time and last minute, and there's so much. . . . So, I mean, you're expected to teach and do all this secretarial work, and there's just not enough time. It's affected my attitude. I'm to the point that I don't know if I want to continue teaching or not.

One fourth grade teacher said that the amount of work placed on her in comparison to her work schedule was grossly misaligned. She felt suffocated by the task to complete items on time.

Different mandates placed on us, to get this done, get that done, and get this finished. I mean, it is just something every year. I know I'll get it done, but just like, *Oh, my gosh*, everything at once. It's kind of overwhelming at times for the paperwork, all the teeny little things you have to get done beyond your classroom instruction.

Other comments stated that oftentimes, these requirements are never communicated prior to the deadline. Several teachers claimed that there were multiple occasions when large mandated tasks were given to them just before the deadline. A new teacher in seventh grade expressed her tasks to complete student record files.

There are these general expectations of things teachers have to do. But we'll have moments where all of a sudden we realize we're in charge of 35 cumulative files that was never mentioned to us ever before.

One middle school teacher stated that she still had a large quantity of procedural items to complete before the end of the school year. She also reported that she had made the decision that she would not be returning to her current position. Yet, she felt an obligation to make sure that all documentation was prepared completely. She stated multiple times that she would complete the necessary steps for her students, so that they were properly placed at their instructional level for the following year.

I think I need to make sure that all these procedures are done properly. . . . And so I also have several things on my to-do list that I want to get done just in order to fulfill my role as a teacher and fulfill my last month with my students. I also have

a lot of things that I want to get done on behalf of the students. . . . I want to make sure they're all prepared.

Another response from a third grade teacher indicated that her stress came from not completing some of these mandated documents when she had available time. "I feel like time management is a huge stress factor, because I feel like we didn't prepare as much as we should have in the summer, so now we're just kind of trying to stay afloat," she replied.

One seventh grade teacher described her workload stress being connected to missing resources. She stated that she spent extra time to input grades manually, due to the fact that the district did not have an electronic grade book.

> It's stressful because we are spending all this time inputting grades that we have already created in our grade book, yet [grades] don't directly transfer and print out into a report card, which would only make sense. Instead, we just have to transfer [grades] for hours, which is very stressful. It's very stressful and it's very time consuming, and it takes up several evenings in a week.

Teachers reported that they were required to perform additional duties as part of their job description. However, these extra duties were not directly connected to student achievement; therefore, the subcategory of *other commitments* identified additional stress on teachers' time commitments. The tasks that two middle school teachers reported as stressful were related to the school community. One teacher described her task of orchestrating a school-wide event for students. The seventh grade teacher stated that she knew about the event; however, she claimed that she had no prior knowledge that her administration had not made any of the arrangements.

> As it is the end of the year, my students are going through a lot of different activities that are supposed to be organized by the school. This is another instance where there are five activities in the next four weeks that are not planned because it was never actually conveyed to the teachers until two weeks ago. . . . they

[teachers] were put in charge of making all of this happen for this entire 300 class size of students.

An eighth grade teacher felt stressed over her involvement in school community time commitments. These commitments embodied both off-campus community involvement and various on-site committees. The teacher did acknowledge the importance of these extracurricular activities, but also viewed these as additional obligations that added to her workload.

> There are an overwhelming amount of obligations I feel that I have at this school. I feel like some obligations involve engaging your parents and getting involved with the community . . . just things that make your classroom better. Then there's committee work here, so it always seems like there's something else that you need to do. It is incredibly time consuming and doesn't ally itself directly with instruction.

It was clear that the teachers in this study had multiple issues with their workload and the lack of time available to fulfill their many assignments that spanned many obligations pertaining to their positions.

Evaluation. Teachers expressed anxiety over the district's new evaluation system, TOI. Hence, the subcategory, *evaluation* was added beneath *workload*. This year, District ABC implemented a new system that was more comprehensive than previous years, and ultimately more time-consuming for teachers. Participants remarked that the evaluations occurred more frequently than in previous years. "Some of the stressors are all these observations," commented one seventh grade teacher. Some teachers replied that they were not sure of how the results of this tool would reflect on them as educators.

> And I think that I personally just got like very stressed about what this meant for me and what this meant for my kids. And I know that there were so many other teachers who were really, really stressed out about it to the point that there were teachers having nervous breakdowns over what lessons they were going to teach and how it was going to go and what kids were going to be in there and how it was going to be perceived,

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answered a seventh grade teacher about her current stressors.

Three elementary teachers expressed their anxiety about their scores and wondered if they would transcend into some type of labeling system, similar to the way students or schools are labeled based on assessment data. "We have all these evaluations and I think it's biased because we're just getting labeled by a person that we don't even know," was the comment from a fifth grade teacher. Teachers were concerned that the evaluators would not be able to see the whole picture. There was some fear that the observation was only a snapshot of their instruction and that the evaluator could not know if they were *good* teachers or not after one or two observations. "And we do our best and it's never good, and it's never enough," stated the same fifth grade teacher. And one teacher from fourth grade admitted to needing help with the expectations of the new evaluation system.

There were other comments concerning the quantity of observations now required coupled with the type of feedback given. A third grade teacher expressed that there were more evaluations now than in prior years. "We have so many evaluations and people coming in." Some teachers felt that there were more negative than positive comments. Another third grade teacher stated,

> I mean, if they were criticizing for huge things . . . but for little things, like not wording something correctly on the board, like a content objective or a language objective . . . in the realm of life, it's silly.

This teacher felt defensive about her evaluations this year. She believed that she was the expert of her students and replied, "And what bothers me is I honestly don't feel like anyone could come in my room and do it better than me. So that's a little bit annoying or unsettling."

Workload grade level frequency. When the comments from teachers were viewed through grade bands, the responses were fairly comparable between elementary teachers and middle school teachers. However, when the individual grades were examined by the frequency of responses, the seventh grade teachers surpassed the other teachers for reporting (44%) stress in this category. This central theme did garnish 29% of all responses, which placed *workload* as the second highest stressor for this study.

Curriculum

Participants also revealed stress concerning elements of their instructional curriculum. The central category of *curriculum* described some of their stressors with two ancillary components. The *scope of curriculum* described this study's participants' stress due to a need for professional development that reinforced content, and an *overall comprehensive knowledge* of the new standards. Although both subcategories are associated with content, there was a detectable distinction between the two areas. Teachers felt that both of these areas raised their levels of stress by either a lack of content knowledge, or as a deficiency of instructional practices to effectively implement the new standards.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Teachers complained that they were anxious about the common core standards, and their comments were classified within the subtheme of *curriculum*. Many teachers felt stress from not having a complete understanding of the Common Core Standards. Participants stated that there was some trepidation of their lack of knowledge with these new standards. "I think the biggest thing for me this year has been just being familiar with the Common Core Standards and having the materials for those standards," stated one third grade teacher.

One fourth grade teacher's claimed that her stressor with CCSS centered on how many components were involved with these standards. She reported that she struggled with ways to incorporate them successfully. "My major stressor this year is implementing the common core and doing it effectively with less time. This year that I've had less time for instruction with my students is due to our schedule," she stated.

Another third grade teacher said that the changes in the new curriculum standards and expectations were stressful to her. "Some of the stressors are the change of curriculum. You're used to one type of lesson plan, and out of nowhere it just changes and you have to recreate everything; you have to learn it."

There were other responses from participants that stated that they experienced stress with curriculum; however, they did not specifically cite the new standards as the culprit. "Unfamiliarity with the content" was the statement from one eighth grade teacher. He felt stressed that he was not sufficiently knowledgeable with his curriculum or the new standards and that the only resources he received was a curriculum map.

Other comments divulged a certain level of anxiety with their inexperience with content. "Science is difficult to teach, and I don't have a background in science," was this teacher's additional response concerning curriculum. This stressor came from a lack of training in a specific content area.

"It's a challenge and something that I don't know," he stated regarding teaching science. Stress for him revolved around his deficit in content knowledge and the time it took to learn the content before he was able to teach it to his students.

"CCSS is a big stressor." This additional eighth grade teacher also stated that his current textbooks did not align with the common core standards.

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One seventh grade teacher's comments did not point to the Common Core

Standards directly; however, her stress came from "having to develop your own entire

curriculum." She felt that the district gave her a very basic guide for the curriculum and

that she was on her own to make sense of it.

One teacher explained that she was repeatedly asked to change grade levels within

a short time span:

> I have taught six different grade levels in this district. Not knowing what I'm
> going to teach the next year and the changes in the curriculum for me is very
> stressful, because I have to adjust to a different curriculum, something that I don't
> know . . . I get to the point sometimes that I just cry truly. I go home and cry,
> because I have to learn something new. It's not just that I have to teach it; I have
> to learn it. I have been moved from second to sixth to fourth, from third to
> second, to sixth, to fourth, to fifth. The district has not given me opportunity to be
> good at anything.

Time management was another large concern for teachers who did not know their

content areas. These teachers claimed that they spent extra time with lesson preparation

because they also had to learn the content simultaneously. One MS teacher stated that

there were several changes to her curriculum maps during the current school year. These

changes in schedule, curriculum maps, and new standards were stressful to her both in

content and the workload involved with changing her instruction.

Professional development. There were several comments directed at the lack of

professional development. Teachers stated that part of the problem with the lack having a

limited skillset with the Common Core Standards stemmed from insufficient training

from the district. Conversely, it was noted that the population of this study consisted of

many inexperienced teachers, which cited a deficit in curricular knowledge. When

comparing the data of this study with both the national and state averages, as stated

throughout, this study incorporated a larger-than-average percentage of new teachers,

which inherently corresponded to a higher need for increased curriculum development. Although not accounted for in this study, District ABC employed a large number of Teach for America employees, which qualified the need for additional curriculum development.

A comment from a third grade teacher said that she was concerned about not knowing what to do with these new standards. She stated a lack of clarity with how to implement within the Common Core Standards. "But it was very stressful to try to understand what should be taught, how it should be taught, how it should be assessed, and what activities should go along with everything."

An eighth grade teacher echoed this statement when she commented that she felt the district had "no real curriculum" because of a lack of professional development. "And I did not personally feel that there was enough support in that regard to try to really understand what the standards were," commented an eighth grade teacher with two years of experience.

Veteran teachers also expressed this concern as seen in the comments of an eighth grade teacher who felt that the district provided "no training on the CCSS." Many teachers of all experience levels expressed high levels of stress in this area due to the fact that they were unclear or untrained for the instructional shifts both for instructional delivery and assessments.

Curriculum grade level frequency. The responses from teachers were analyzed further to determine any trends in grade level or grade bands for increased stress. When breaking down these responses by grade level, third grade teachers had the most stress (41%) for this category. When grade bands were compared, *curriculum* was the only area

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where elementary teachers claimed more stress than the middle school teachers by a margin of approximately 2 to 1. Teachers were fairly split between stresses of understanding the Common Core Standards and the professional development that was needed to support teachers with the new standards among area content areas. Based on all responses, teachers placed *curriculum* as the lowest area for stress (19%).

Students

The coding that evolved into the formation of the category of *students* was quite diversified. This category involved the student populace on multiple levels. Participants responded with the expected typical stressors when considering students, such as class size, but also mentioned situations typical in the urban core schools. Study participants cited the language barrier as being stressful, as well as problems that were associated with domestic instability. It was also stated that large class sizes often led to disruptive behavior concerns. Therefore, within the *student* category, these subcategories of *class size, behavior, home life,* and *language barrier* emerged.

Class size. Concern with student *class size* garnered the most discussion within this category. The middle school teachers were the only grade levels who expressed any anxiety with large class sizes. A seventh grade teacher stated that four or five of her classes had 40 or more students. She described grouping her students in a circle around a whiteboard at one point when her SMART board stopped working. She claimed that in addition to instructing classes of that size, the large caseload required extra planning and grading time.

One seventh grade teacher claimed that many of her distresses came from large class sizes and her ability to effectively reach all students. She explained, "And I feel as

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though the class sizes have gotten bigger and bigger; We've been required to keep up with more and more students and our effect on students has become a little bit less than it could be." She stated that the ability to provide individualized attention for her students decreased as class sizes increased.

An eighth grade teacher reported that his average class size consisted of 35 students. He echoed the argument that with such large class sizes, students are more likely to receive less teacher-to-student interaction time. Additionally, an eighth grade male teacher mirrored that comment with this statement: "Classes are too large to teach effectively and manage behavior." Another seventh grade teacher gave this summation, "My class sizes are huge!"

Behavior. Besides large class sizes potentially affecting student achievement, teachers also expressed their stress with difficulties with classroom management. Teachers reported that large class sizes made it harder to maintain classroom behavior. "It makes it fun and exhilarating and challenging. There's never a dull moment, but I can certainly say that some of the distractions and stress are from the size of my classes," added one eighth grade teacher. She continued by stating that oftentimes she was required to deal with disruptive students, which interrupted her class instruction.

One veteran fourth grade teacher reported that behavior has been a problem for the past 11 years of her teaching career. Her major concern was that she could not control the behavior of some of her students and she often felt powerless to control it. "It is just behaviors in the classroom from particular students, since I get emotionally involved with my kids and expect the best from them."

A fourth grade teacher that was new to teaching echoed the same sentiment about dealing with disruptive student behavior.

> I would say student behaviors and other—is a big one for me, as well. Just learning, trying to apply all the stuff from school to teaching. And there's so many different theories, and sometimes they seem to conflict until you get better at them, and you realize how they do fit together.

An inexperienced third grade teacher shared similar frustrations for dealing with behavior. She claimed her own lack of understanding contributed to her stress. She said, "I want my students to do really well and I have an expectation and a hope for them. And it's hard, because you can't control another person's choices."

One fourth grade teacher described her students' behavior issues as so extreme that it actually caused her to suffer health problems. She felt that her fragile emotional state of mind caused her to neglect the other students. Another fourth grade teacher described that some of her behavior issues in her class revolved around bullying. She stated that not only was there bullying in the classroom, but there were also times when she had to address the issue in other areas of the school campus

Middle school teachers experienced more severe disruptions in the classroom. One teacher described a prior position in an alternative school that enrolled many students with behavioral issues and it was extremely stressful. However, she felt that this previous experience helped prepare her with student management in later years.

A seventh grade teacher felt that her school did not provide sufficient procedural interventions for student behavior infractions and that she was forced to handle disruptions on her own. A first year teacher from eighth grade said, "It's [behavior] stressful because it's harder to maintain engagement; it's harder to maintain order; it's harder to maintain management."

A final comment from an eighth grade teacher who was not only stressed by student misbehavior, but also upset by the way the lax school behavior policies failed to deter any issues. The area that stressed her most about behavior was the premise that most students know they are *unaccountable.*

Language barrier. There were a few comments that addressed the language barrier, which is a reflection of the fact that District ABC is comprised of a high ELL student population. One teacher described her frustrations as an ELL teacher who did not speak her students' native language. For the past two years, she taught in an ELL classroom and expressed her stress when she felt inadequately prepared by the district to deliver the language acquisition needed to increase student achievement. Her stressor was with her lack of support in her position as an ELL teacher, and not with the language deficit of her students.

The same fourth grade teacher felt that the language barrier was stressful for her because she did not speak Spanish. Many of students only spoke Spanish in her ELL classroom and she felt anxiety and uncertainty with her understanding of their needs. She also expressed concerns over translation issues, especially when speaking with parents, who were also native Spanish speakers.

Home life

The category of *home life* evolved from responses that teachers answered involving student issues that manifested outside of the school sites. Middle school teachers reported level of stress when incidents occurred that required them to contact Child Protective Services. An eighth grade teacher acting on the child's welfare described

ambivalent feelings on contacting CPS. She was concerned about the child, yet wary of the outcomes that could ensue from such drastic measures.

A fourth grade teacher commented about one student's emotional state from being victimized for a criminal act. She felt a great deal of anxiety over the exploitation of this child, and also the fact that this student now suffered enduring emotional trauma. Although there were no comments that faulted the school site or district, she did express her stress from this incident.

One eighth grade teacher reported that the home life of her students negatively impacted their actions and behavior at school. She stated that some of her students live in an economically challenged environment and that oftentimes they not receive adequate educational support.

> They come from very disadvantaged backgrounds. Some don't have a lot of support at home. There are a lot of distractions that they have to encounter in terms of gangs and drugs and fights and friends and also just things that don't have to do with any middle school, which negatively impact them.

This teacher believed that this type of home life was indicative of many of her students and that it did increase her stress level. Again, no responsibility was placed on the district; however, stress was still involved because of what teachers themselves knew the students were experiencing within their home lives.

Student grade level frequency. Teachers responded with 23% of the total number of responses for the category of *student grade level frequency*. When grade level responses were viewed for frequency, middle school teachers attributed slightly more of their stress (56%) to student behaviors than elementary teachers. However, teachers in the fourth grade expressed stress for *students,* amounting to 40% of the total number of

comments. Through further analysis, fifth grade teachers reported the fewest areas of stress within this category.

Highest Current Stressor

The final question asked participants their current level of stress and their most prominent source of stress. Table 7 displays the data from Question 6 by comparing participants' number, grade level and current level of stress. The level of stress was quantified on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest. The average value for this study's participants' level of stress was 4.1. This mean demonstrated that there was a very high level of stress for the teachers of this urban district. The question was the final query of the focus group interviews. This question afforded significance because it compelled the participants to make one choice for a current stressor.

Table 7

Overall Results for Question 6

#	Grade level	Level of stress	Current main stressor
1	3	5	Workload - Lessons
2	4	5	Workload - Lessons
3	3	5	Workload - Mandates
4	7	4	Workload - Lessons
5	4	4	Curriculum - CCSS
6	4	5	Students – Behavior
7	3	5	Curriculum – CCSS
8	4	2	(No Specific Category)
9	5	3	(No Specific Category)
10	5	3	Students - Home Life

Table 7 (continued)

Overall Results for Question 6

#	Grade level	Level of stress	Current main stressor
11	8	4	Curriculum: Planning
12	8	4	Workload: Mandates
13	8	4	Students: Behavior
14	8	4	Support: Resources
15	7	4	Workload: Lessons
16	7	3	Curriculum: Planning
17	8	4	Support: Administration
18	8	5	Students: Behavior
19	4	5	Support: Resources
20	8	4	Support: Resources
			Average: 4.1

Note. Average level of stress on scale of 1-5

The responses from teachers were matched to the main categories and averaged to gain a comprehensive depiction of where the most influential categories of stress existed for District ABC currently. The most stressful category was *workload*, followed by the categories of *support, curriculum*, and *students,* which received an equal number of responses as displayed in Figure 11. There was an additional category, *undecided,* added because two participants did not identify a specific stressor for the final question. These indecisive responses were from teachers with a low level of stress.
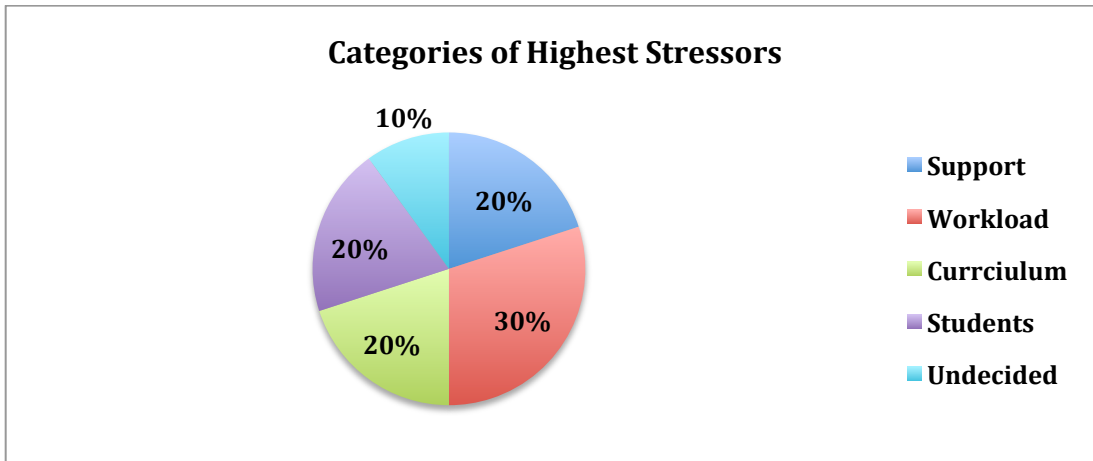
Figure 11. Categories of highest stressors

Next, the data from Question 6 focused on individual responses about current highest stressors and compared the responses with one of the major or minor themes that were developed within this study. Each category highlighted one final example of what causes stress for teachers in this district. Selected descriptors were chosen by their unique responses and in-depth comments that encompassed one of the four major themes of this study.

Highest current stressor for workload. An eighth grade teacher stated that teaching was very time consuming. She described the timeframe that it takes her to accomplish most tasks in a typical school week. She highlighted the school site expectations interlaced with her instructional obligations as a teacher.

> I feel with just looking at my time, I work from 7 or 7:30 a.m. until probably till like 5:30 or 6 p.m. every night. And then I will maybe take an hour or two out for dinner, but then I'm up until 11:00 pm or midnight every night. I'm usually getting grading done, getting lesson planning done, or finding that book that's going to get my kids interested in this lesson. My prep times are almost entirely taken up by school meetings or parent meetings. . . . Our school principal says that we also need to have a grade level meeting, which is rather just like giving us more stuff to do. I just feel constantly like I never have even a slight second to catch my breath. And then on my weekends, if I gave an assignment that needs to be graded, then I can almost rest assured that Saturday will be spent grading that

assignment for the entire day. And then on Sunday, it's back to the lesson planning drawing board to prepare for the week.

Highest current stressor for students. For this category of highest stressors, an eighth grade teacher discussed a situation where his students do not value their education. He described his frustrations with the concept of student retainment and how unconcerned his students were about their success. He described a great sadness for his students that in his mind are choosing a "dead-end" path, yet he felt powerless to alter their course.

> The systemic problems are going to continue. Despite what you have done, there are just certain things that limit you as a person. We have limits as a district; we have limits as a school. So despite how hard I'm working, I am perpetuating the problem, because I was not able to do something as simple as retain a student. A student who has given up on himself, has given up on school and will consistently say that he doesn't care if he ever gets through high school, and I think that makes me angry with that student. It makes me scared and sad and upset because I think that in that student's mind, and a lot of my students, I see that it doesn't really click when I say this. I'm trying to tell them that you can't change everything around in high school. You're not going to be able to just suddenly get it in high school if you don't start working now. So, I think the most dangerous fear that I have taken part in a system where society would not meet them halfway, and they're only 13 and 14. . . . So if they don't rise up and double up on their work, which they haven't done yet, and I'm afraid they won't do it next year, the reality might be that they drop out of high school. And what that will do to their life and their future is just heartbreaking.

Highest current stressor for curriculum. A third grade teacher explained her biggest stressor as her feelings of inadequacy as a new teacher. Her frustrations surfaced from her inexperiences with the profession, as well as her lack of content knowledge with the Common Core Standards and practices.

> This is my first year and I just don't feel confident. I don't feel like I'm doing a good job with my students. I feel bad for them sometimes, because I feel like they're kind of guinea pigs, because this is my first year and I'm just trying out new things, seeing what works, and what doesn't work. And at times I don't feel like I did the best job that I could, and I feel like I could do a better job. I just don't have the skills or the coordination to do a good job, and that's the big

umbrella that stresses me out. I want them to do well, but am I the right person for them? So, sometimes I question myself. And then there's Common Core. How can I plan effectively? So, I guess that would be my biggest stressor is unknowing if I'm doing a good job with all that I don't know.

Highest current stressor for support. For this category of biggest stressors, an eighth grade teacher discussed a condition that exposed a broken educational system. She described her frustrations with the concept of student promotion for failing grades and deviant behavior. Her tone signified her discontent with the disproportionate accountability levels that embody our institutions of learning and how the system is failing our students.

> The area that stresses me out most is that many students know that they are, for the most part, unaccountable to grades and behavior. And I mean, I'm not big into coercion, but I'm big into justice and laws and social contracts. And one doesn't exist where students are actually required to follow procedures in order to succeed. The fact that we are going to be socially promoting students who have all Fs and can only read and compute math at the fourth and fifth grade level. Kids who are starting fights, smoking weed on campus, are telling teachers to F-off. The fact that we're socially promoting them [students] is despicable, actually. And it's a tragedy for these students and for the system. And that is what I go to sleep thinking about at night that keeps me up. Because of how the system is structured, we have no other choice. And I'm not saying that it's the district's fault, the school's fault, or our own fault as teachers, but it's a combination of all three. It's some unfortunate combination of state and federal laws.

Impact of Stress

In Chapter 2, prior research has shown that prolonged occupational stress has negative consequences that can have both physiological and psychological effects on teachers. Therefore this study questioned participants about possible increases in their levels of stress as part of the overall assessment of the teachers in this study. In the last section of Part 1, teachers were asked to discuss how their stress impacted their performance in some way. As part of Question 3, participants were asked to consider if their levels of stress had increased over time as teachers. As has been pointed out, it is

important to note that five teachers in this study were first year teachers, so there was no comparison for them to prior experience. Also embedded in Question 3, teachers were asked to respond to how their stress affected others at school, namely their students and their colleagues. This data further developed the overall picture of stressors for urban teachers. Table 8 displays the responses from all participants.

Table 8

How Stress Impacts Teachers

Teacher	Grade level	Increase in stress	Affects students	Affects colleagues
1	3	Yes	No	No
2	4	Yes	No	No
3	3	Yes	No	No
4	7	Yes	No	No
5	4	No	No	No
6	4	Yes	Yes	No
7	3	Yes	No	Yes
8	4	No	No	Yes
9	5	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	5	No	No	No
11	8	No	Yes	Yes
12	8	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	8	Yes	Yes	Yes
14	8	Yes	Yes	Yes
15	7	Yes	Yes	No
16	7	Yes	Yes	No
17	8	Yes	No	Yes
18	8	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 8 (continued)

How Stress Impacts Teachers

#	Grade level	Increase in stress	Affects students	Affects colleagues
19	4	Yes	Yes	Yes
20	8	Yes	Yes	No

Participants responded differently by grade levels when asked if their stress level negatively affected their colleagues or students. When teachers were questioned if their stress affected students, it was evident that the middle school teachers felt that their stress had affected their students in some fashion. A seventh grade teacher responded,

> With my students, I don't know if they sense my stress. I know there are times where I'll be really tired and feel unprepared. And I think that kind of feeds off of them, and I notice that the behavior kind of goes down—or, I'm sorry, the behavior escalates. And the classroom management part goes down when I am more tired on some days or if I am having a bad day. So I know that it does affect them. And then when I do feel more confident, I feel like the classroom management is a lot more manageable with them.

Most MS teachers responded that their students *sensed* that they were stressed, and one teacher reported that her students even questioned her about her tense behavior.

The responses from all teachers indicated that the lower the elementary grades, the lower their stress affected their students. However, one third grade teacher said, "It affects the students because you have a frustrated teacher that's getting upset at any and every little thing." Another elementary teacher from the fourth grade felt that it was important to remain calm and not allow the students to see your anxiety. "As far as my students, I feel like if students see that you're stressed, they feed off of it, and they'll act out more," she stated.

When examining how stress affected colleagues, results were similar. Again, eighth grade teachers exhibited the highest results when questioned if their occupational stress impacted them on the job in some way.

> I would say my stress affects other teachers just when working them collaboratively. If I'm really stressed out and I'm allowing it to bother me, then—I'm not able to engage and put as much work into what we're doing as they are.

Elementary teachers, specifically third grade teachers, felt that stress had little influence with their co-workers. A third grade teacher commented that her colleagues realized when she was under a lot of pressure and expressed sympathy, "So they see that I'm stressed, so they're more supportive with that."

In summary, middle school teachers stated that their levels of stress were high enough to cause some type of negative response with both their students and their colleagues. The lower elementary grades had the lowest level of impact on either colleagues or students due to their occupational stress.

In general, teachers stated that their stress had increased in some capacity. All participants at all grade levels, except four teachers, reported an increase in their levels of stress. That translated into 80% of the participants expressing an increase in occupational stress, which included 95% of the eighth grade teachers in this study.

Summary

In the focus groups, teachers were questioned about their past and current stressors. Through analysis of all responses, the formation of four main categories emerged. By further disaggregating individual comments, several subcategories were identified through the coding process. In summation, the largest stressors for participants in this study of urban teachers were a high *workload* and a lack of *support*. The middle

school teachers responded with the highest frequency within these two areas. Elementary teachers, on the other hand, stated that their largest stressor was a deficiency in *curriculum,* more specially the Common Core Standards, which included a lack of training of the standards. Elementary teachers edged out MS teachers with more concerns with *students*, most notably with large class sizes for both grade bands.

When breaking down the responses from teachers at the experience level, it was evident that lack of *support* dominated all levels of experience. However, when past and current stressors were separated, there were some differences based on the frequency of participants' responses as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Highest Area of Stress

Experience level	Highest category for past stressors	Highest category for current stressors
9-12 years	Support	Curriculum
5-8 years	Workload	Support
1-4 years	Support	Support

In summation, the data revealed that the teachers in this urban school district have communicated that they currently have high levels of occupational stress. In review of the grade level responses, middle school teachers expressed more stress than the teachers in the elementary grades. It was also evidenced that all teachers stated that a lack of *support* was the chief area of stress, which was demonstrated through individual grade level responses from teachers, and likewise when calculated by levels of experience.

Part 2: Ways to Alleviate Stress for Urban Teachers

The second part of Chapter 4, from Question 4, compiled the participants'
responses about programs or policies that were utilized in District ABC. Also, from
Question 5, there were recommendations to lessen stressors from teachers in this study.
First of all, teachers were asked to discuss ways that the district provided support that
helped alleviate stress for staff. Participants' answers were first categorized to state
whether the district or school site did provide support, or if the district or school site did
not provide support when dealing with teachers' stress. Next, the participants who made
commented that backed up the existence of district support were examined for
effectiveness.

Out of the 20 teacher participants, 12 (60%) reported that there was some type of
support to help mitigate their source of stress. Conversely, 40%, or eight teachers, stated
that the site or district did *not* support or lessen stressors for teachers. From the group of
teachers that affirmed that there was some type of support measures in place, 67% of
those said that the current support measures were ineffective in alleviating their stress
levels. Further analysis revealed that of the group that stated that the district did offer
teacher support, 88% of middle school teachers thought that the support was ineffective
(see Figure 12).
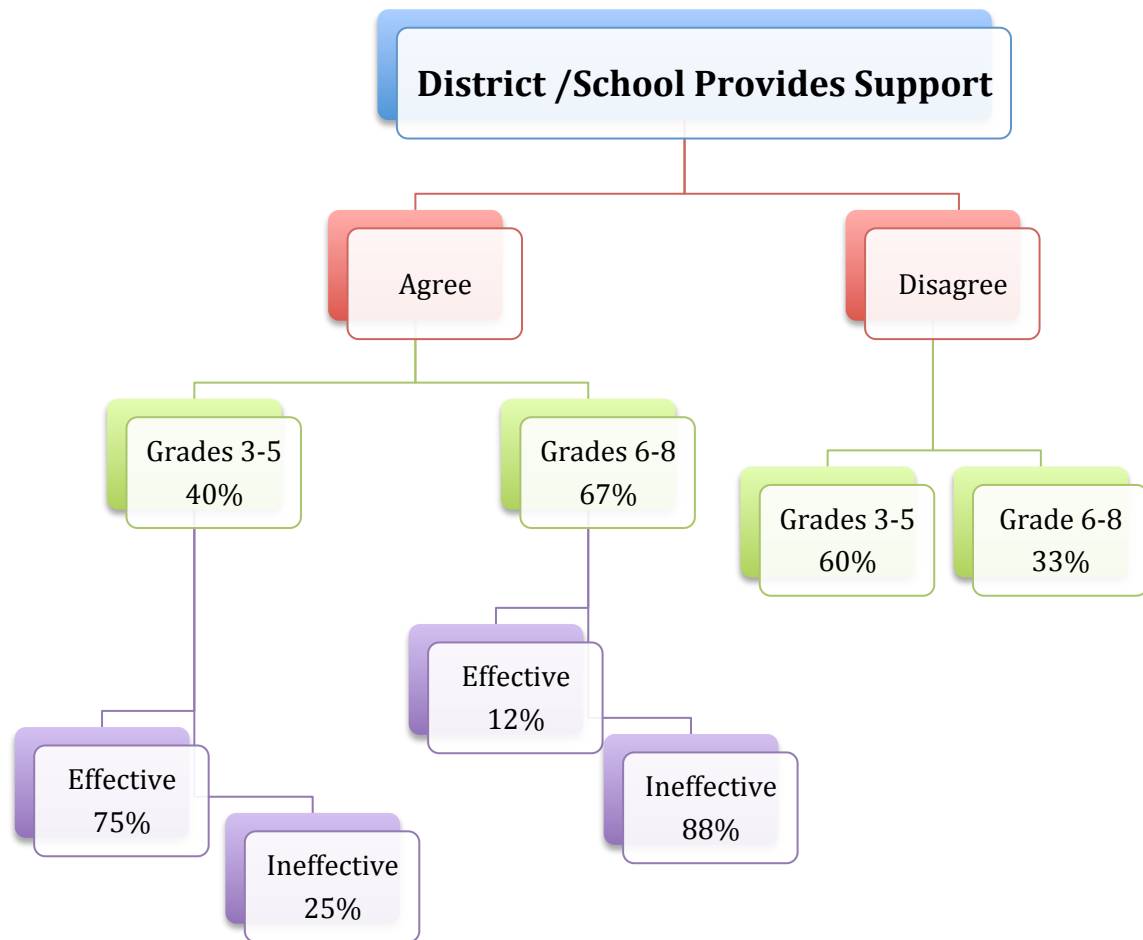
Figure 12. District/school provides support

Effective Support

Some participants found the support provided by the district or school site was effective in mitigating their stress levels. The elementary teachers who acknowledged effective support practices provided examples that aligned with the *support* category; whereas, one MS teacher referred to an effective practice within the *workload* theme. Again, it was the elementary teachers who felt that there was support within the *curriculum* category in regards to professional development.

An *open door policy* was the term utilized by a fourth grade teacher to describe the positive two-way communication at her school. She stated that team collaboration by staff and administrators were effective tools to help relieve stress. "We have a good staff here; you could go talk to people to help you, and I've always felt like I could always go to teachers and they could help me out as a resource." She felt that the ease of accessibility to communicate her needs with colleagues was an effective means to alleviate stress.

Another fourth grade teacher described a similar situation about accessing support with her co-workers at her school. She thought that the culture of her school nurtured a safe environment, so that she could reach out for help to anyone and not feel chastised. She stated that her site recognized there were many stressful circumstances throughout the campus and that the administration tried to manifest teambuilding as a support system.

> I feel like we have a good support system here. I feel like I can email the teachers without feeling scared that someone's going to judge me or anything like that. I feel like I have people to go to if I am stressed out. I also appreciate that the staff does try to create staff spirit with team builders. So I do appreciate that, because I think they do have that understanding of everyone is stressed, no matter of the levels.

Another elementary teacher felt that the new teacher training provided support. She stated that the district offered programs for new teachers, titled BEGIN, which offered new teachers support with lesson planning. She commented that if new teachers came into the training sessions mid-year, it proved more difficult to obtain benefits; however, the intentions by the district were good. "But I feel like overall, at the district level and a school level, they do try their best to try to alleviate the stress," stated one third grade teacher.

Workload. A middle school teacher stated that the administrator at his site has offered flexibility with some tasks. He felt that his administration gave him certain freedoms to prioritize the projects that were the most significant to student learning and push back the non-essential tasks to a later time.

> The administration here knows that we do have deadlines and we do have things that we have to do, but I think that they also understand that things can be prioritized. So I don't necessarily feel a lot of pressure to complete all the minimal tasks that aren't really going to make a difference in a student's life every single day; whereas, I do feel a more sense of urgency with things that are actually going to matter to helping my students succeed.

Curriculum. The other comments from teachers who felt effectively supported by the district spotlighted professional development. Two elementary teachers responded that they benefited by the instructional training provided by the district. One fourth grade teacher stated that professional development was updated yearly and that it was useful to improve her instruction.

> As a district, I mean, every year is different, every year is different for professional development, depending on the needs of our district . . . sometimes I have to probably push myself professionally. . . . More and more teachers depend on it [PD]. Another great PD is STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics] because they don't know it [STEM] and that's something that most teachers need.

Training on CCSS was also a beneficial professional development session, because all teachers needed the training on the new standards. She advocated that each year teachers were offered new curricular support based on the district's latest initiatives.

A third grade teacher also commented that the Professional Development (PD) was useful. She felt that the instructional training was offered at convenient times. She stated that PD was available during the school day, which allowed peer collaboration

time. Because many teachers were involved in after-school activities, in-school trainings allowed her to participate with peer instructional groups.

Non-Effective Support

Participants felt that although support was given by a school site or even the district office, it was not effective in alleviating stress. Some teachers actually reported an increase in stress due to the illusion of teacher support, or in a few cases the fumbling of assistance. Overall, teachers responded that more often than not, support currently provided was ineffective.

Support. The area where teachers felt the most stress was the lack of *support* by administration, both at the sites and through the district. Some comments stated that administration offered a mere gesture of support without actually providing any assistance. Other teachers remarked that administrators merely hinted at fulfilling a specific need for teachers. A middle school teacher had these comments:

> At this school site, our administrators often pledge support, but it doesn't materialize. So, for instance, an administrator will say, "Oh, I'll come into your classroom," or "I'll make sure to pop in just to check on certain students, see how this class is behaving," or whatever. But those promises are usually empty, so those are the ways that support is given to us [teachers].

One seventh grade teacher stated that her school site has tried in the past to do little things, like staff breakfasts to build community and uplift the faculty in spirit. However, these actions did not have a positive effect for any length of time in her opinion. She stated that the environment at her school seemed to function more on an independent level rather than at an interdependent level.

> I feel like in this school site it [stress] is looked down upon. If you admit that something stresses you out, or that you're having a difficult time, it's almost as if it's like another thing for our administrators to deal with instead of owning that part of our professional responsibility.

Her perception was that the district or the current administration did not care about a staff's stress level and what they could do to help. "I think a lot of things are just superficial, 'Let's just do it because we've said we do it, so it's on the books,'" was her statement referring to the ineffective assistance from her administrators. She went on to say that she felt that the support was not sincere. This teacher also stated that she thought that if the district were to conduct exit interviews, then maybe some of these issues might be exposed.

Another middle school teacher stated that neither her administration nor the district had ever asked her, with the exception of this interview, what was stressful to her. She mentioned that she would have welcomed the following questions,

> What working conditions make it difficult for you to be a teacher here? How could we improve the working conditions here so that good teachers like you want to stay?" What could we do to make the working conditions better?

She concluded by stating that she felt that she gave her best effort to the students and to the district, but did not feel that the efforts by administration were reciprocated. "And I feel that is unacceptable. . . . I think that the district and that the school should be asking us [teachers] what is stressing you out and what can we do to make it better?"

Teachers responded that insufficient resources were another concern in providing adequate *support*. An eighth grade teacher responded that the district was obligated to provide basic needs, such as paper. She added that paper was an essential need in a school along with the ability to make copies for the classroom, and that there were many times that both of these necessities were inaccessible. She referenced an incident when she first started with the district and was setting up her classroom. She attempted to access class supplies, but encountered difficulty.

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As a brand new teacher, I had absolutely nothing to fill my classroom after asking for supplies. I mean, grant it, we had a new secretary at the time, so she didn't really know how to get everything started. But I mean I really did have an empty classroom until I went to Staples and made my own purchases, not even knowing that those are all things that the district has and I should have been able to get easily.

The teacher stated that this was the most basic way in which to support teachers, and still she was erroneously led to believe that basic supplies were not attainable.

Finally, one seventh grade teacher detailed an academic science competition that she felt unsupported with for the majority of the process. She explained that she registered her class for a project that required additional resources. Her detailed account of this curricular event demonstrated the absence of support from both the district and her school administration on multiple levels. She stated that her principal had prior knowledge of all the additional support needed to participate in this competition; however, she felt unsupported from the beginning of the process. First, she needed to utilize computers for her students to complete their projects; she described her plight to gain access to technology.

I don't know how many times that I cried to and from school not knowing whether my kids were going to be able to get on computers to be able to do this competition. And it was only because I was trying to provide my students with an excellent opportunity. And I honestly felt like I was being—I know this sounds crazy, but I honestly felt like it was being jeopardized almost deliberately.

She continued describing her stress through this academic project. Just before the competition event, she failed to receive a confirmation from transportation and was unsure if she would have a bus to attend the event. "So literally the day before the field trip I didn't even know if I was going to have a bus or not, because nobody would respond to a single e-mail or phone call." She reported that the bus arrived at 5:30 am, which forced her and the students to wait outside until the janitor arrived because her

administrators would not come in early. Hence, the bus dropped everyone off two hours early for the event because it was the only time that the district could transport the group. After the completion, she waited three hours for the return bus, which had never been scheduled.

This teacher's story embodied her call for more support to increase her students' academic experience. She enrolled in this academic competition to extend the learning outside of the classroom, but felt unsupported by the district for herself and her students. Consequently, this venture greatly increased her stress level.

Curriculum. Within the category of *curriculum*, most responses were tied to professional development in order to better understand content or practice of instruction. A few teachers commented that there were still unmet needs for basic instruction that was tied to a specific content area, such as science.

Professional development was another area under *curriculum* that teachers replied as a type of support offered by the district. However, many teachers thought that the outcome for the most part did not elevate their professional knowledge. One fourth grade teacher stated,

> But at the end of it, most of the time I feel like I walk out of professional development in the same boat. It's rare when you walk out saying, "Oh, I could be a better teacher now." So the supposed support we're getting, it's not really support.

She also said that when the professional development was during the school day, you had to prepare for a substitute to teach your class. In that case, teachers made detailed subplans and prepped the class for a substitute. Her final comment, "It's more of a stressor."

A third grade teacher had similar feedback. "I just always felt that professional development was usually about something that seemed very unrelated to my students' success." She responded that oftentimes the training was repetitive, like "rephrasing our objectives or calculating the TOI rubric in a number of different ways." She said that many times the presentations were "boring and un-engaging." The teacher believed that in a productive professional development modeling should be included.

> So if we are expected to be good teachers in our classroom, then when we're being trained, we should be using different strategies and methods, which everything can then be incorporated in our classes. But it is pretty rare when they actually do that.

One seventh grade teacher made a strong generic statement about her feelings on how poorly the administration demonstrated support for the teachers on her campus. "I feel very passionately about this, because I feel like if my school or if my district supported me, that I would be coming back."

Suggestions for Increasing Support for Teachers

Support. The comments from participants to improve support systems were approached from two perspectives. The first was to increase support structures through the establishment of a support organization, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). This type of learning organization would help teachers by "learning and growing together," claimed one fourth grade teacher.

> And if you're learning and growing together, that alleviates stress, because you're trying these strategies out, taking your data of moving forward all together every time. You're working with your grade level and across grade levels with the support of your principal. So that will alleviate a lot [stress].

An eighth grade teachers reiterated the power of PLCs, but stated that the effectiveness was dependent on the fact they were used properly.

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We need to use the PLC model the way that it was meant to be used, because oftentimes they end up being directed by the administration. So, I think a lot of times our group of colleagues feels like we're scrambling to do other things. . . . By utilizing the PLCs in the manner that they were designed for and actually letting us [teams] have time to learn and plan with each other would be helpful. For instance, if I needed professional development on classroom management, then I could work on that; whereas, someone else could work on integrating technology into their classroom or whatever.

"PLCs can be run effectively to empower teachers" was another comment from an

eighth grade teacher. She suggested that these learning communities could harness the

expertise of various teachers and build internal empowerment throughout the school.

If the administration actually did real walkthroughs, not just one when somebody comes in your room, but actually got to know what each teacher's strength. Then maybe they could say, "Hey, you're really good at classroom management, you're really good at using technology, you're really good at this or that. Why don't you do a PLC on that?" And then recognizing teachers for these skills to build a support system upon accessing these resources.

Another fourth grade teacher suggested that the district adopt a Mentor Program.

She stated that they utilized mentors for new teachers in the past, but it had not been

effective. A seventh grade teacher additionally supported the idea of incorporating a

comprehensive mentoring program for new teachers. She stated that strong mentor

programs are effective in many other districts.

There is a lot of research about this [mentor programs] that I've done. I heard that other new teachers had mentor teachers at their schools or within their district, and they had meetings where they taught them about the grading system, and IEPs [individualize education programs] but that does not exist here. . . . We need to have a comprehensive on-boarding system that trains our teachers on how to be prepared for various situations that they will face, and train them on the procedures that are in place at their school.

One other suggestion from two middle school teachers was for administrators to

use the direct approach and ask teachers about which issues cause them stress. They

recommended collecting data and then analyzing it for specific factors that are stressful,

and identify the conditions that contribute to that stress. They likewise proposed the use of focus groups to hold candid discussions on this issue.

There were other suggestions that did not recommend a formal type of advocacy, but suggested building a support system in some capacity. One fourth grade teacher simply replied, "Develop support groups." He suggested that teachers bond with each other for mutual benefits, without formalization by the administration. "Find a mentor teacher to deal with problems." This perspective was reiterated from a fifth grade teacher with this advice, "Seek out a group for help." Another fifth grade teacher suggested that teachers find support from anyone that you can talk to, such as counselors, or possibly even administrators.

One eighth grade teacher commented on the need for more support because many teachers in District ABC arrived through the *Teach for America* Program. She stated,

> I'm going through an alternative teaching program, so that kind of contributes to it [stress]. But I think that if a school or if a district is hiring novice teachers through an alternative certification program, they better have the manpower and the resources to support those teachers. Otherwise, after two years they are going to be extremely burnt out.

The second direction that came from teacher interviews to improve support was through a reorganization of the district's *Human Resources*. One eighth grade participant felt that some of the personnel were not being utilized effectively.

> Our paraprofessionals are used for lunch duty about 80% of their day, which I understand is a need of the school, but I think that a lot of the things that they can do. Other teachers have spoken about needing more time to plan or more time to work together, or to have some time to actually have professional learning committees, instead of meetings. This could be accomplished if we used space and people differently.

Another eighth grade teacher suggested reviewing the job descriptions for the school office staff. She thought that it might be possible to utilize the clerical staff to take some of the workload away from teachers.

> I would also formalize the office. "What do the secretaries and attendance clerks do?" Maybe it is possible to have these office personnel complete some of the tasks teachers are accountable for, such as making phone calls. One idea would to have the clerks call parents for missing students during AIMS week instead of teachers.

She proposed that non-certified personnel could assist with some of the mandated paperwork.

One strategy was that a teaching assistant could be assigned to teachers so that these assistants would file papers or help with other paperwork. This change would allow teachers to spend more time teaching and would alleviate some stress. Another clerical task could be to print teachers' report cards for them, so that they are completed by the end of the school day. Clerical assistants could help lessen the paper workload for teachers.

The role of the parent coordinator was questioned by one of the eighth grade teachers. She replied that this coordinator could help reach out to parents at her campus to encourage them to get involved. She stated that if the guidance counselor was not able to help manifest parental involvement, then the burden fell back on the teachers. Effective use of the parent coordinator could help support the teachers in this manner.

Students. It was noted that only middle school teachers referenced the *student* category as an area for needed support, specifically for behavioral procedures. One eighth grade teacher stated that she felt her school should have increased options when dealing with student behavior. She believed that the addition of a behavioral intervention

specialist on campus could assist with controlling misbehavior issues. She also

mentioned that there was not an in-school detention center at her school, which would

assist teachers with a place for students to attend and still acquire academic content.

A seventh grade teacher described the need for more supervision for students

throughout the school passing zones. She answered that teachers are expected to enforce

hallway monitoring and maintain order when students change classes. The teacher felt

that there was more assistance needed to fulfill this order, and that an increased presence

in manpower would be beneficial. She also responded that her administration would hold

teachers responsible if an incident occurred under their supervision.

> So even though they [administration] know we're not able to get out there every
> time if something happens, it's stressful for me to know that I would be held
> responsible. My team is blamed if we weren't out in the hallway when a fight
> broke out. Yet, the reason we weren't out in the hallway is because we were
> trying to do our job in the classroom with our students.

Another eighth grade teacher responded that teachers handle all behavior issues

on her campus. She said that school administration is sending students the wrong

message. The students have realized that their actions may go unchecked, and therefore

they were more likely to "test the waters." She felt adamant that more support for student

behavior was warranted for the safety of the students and the staff. She also mentioned

that there was not an in-school detention center at her school, which would assist teachers

with a place for students to attend and still acquire academic content.

Workload. References to paperwork resurfaced again indicating the time

requirement needed to fulfill this obligation. Two participants felt that if the high volume

of paperwork were indeed necessary, then teachers should be supported with more

clerical help. "We're playing a pushing paper game . . . we have to just be responsible for

so much that somebody else could do it, so we could focus more on students" was the comment from a fourth grade teacher.

Another fourth grade teacher explained that she did not operate at her highest performance level due to lack of sleep, and that the schools needed to build in additional planning time during the school day. She stated that administrators must either decrease the workload, or increase the time for teachers to complete all necessary tasks.

Curriculum. Teachers offered suggestions to improve knowledge of the curriculum or instruction**.** A seventh grade teacher wanted more training with technology. "Another thing would be just having trainings that are just more practical, like trainings on our Promethean Boards or SMART Boards."

A fourth grade teacher recommended team teaching as a good alternative. "There is a huge language problem since many students are ELL. Provide ELL teachers with PD on CCSS and other standards to help teach ELL students and elevate curriculum." She also wanted more ELL training for teachers, because the AZELLA had changed and there would be less movement in ELL classrooms.

Another fourth grade teacher suggested reorganizing the way the LOI was scored. Her idea was based on the various instructional skills that teachers possess at different levels of experience.

> The teacher evaluation, I feel, needs to be different . . . instead of just evaluating you just on how you are in your class right now; it should be more of a progression of how you were from the beginning. Because, again, every teacher's different, every teacher's at a different point in their career. So, a new teacher coming in shouldn't be evaluated on the same rubric as an experienced teacher. But when they show growth, then they should be— you know.

An MS teacher wanted more training on Common Core Standards and practices.

Common core is new, so it would be nice to have some kind of lesson sequence standards . . . because that has caused a lot of stress, I think, for new teachers, and even teachers who are just new to the Common Core Standards.

Summary

Part 2 of the results section revealed that the teachers in this study felt that there were not many effective measures in place to help lessen stress. Some elementary teachers stated that the district offered some effective procedures, especially in the area of professional development. Many of these teachers acknowledged support from the district and expressed their appreciation. However, middle school teachers did not concede that there was much worthwhile support within the district. Both grade levels offered suggestions within the major themes. It was again clear that a lack of *Support* was the chief area of concern, which was demonstrated by teachers across the grade levels as shown in Figure 13. This final graph was a culmination of all participants' responses for this study and the data were utilized in Chapter 5 for discussion and further recommendations.
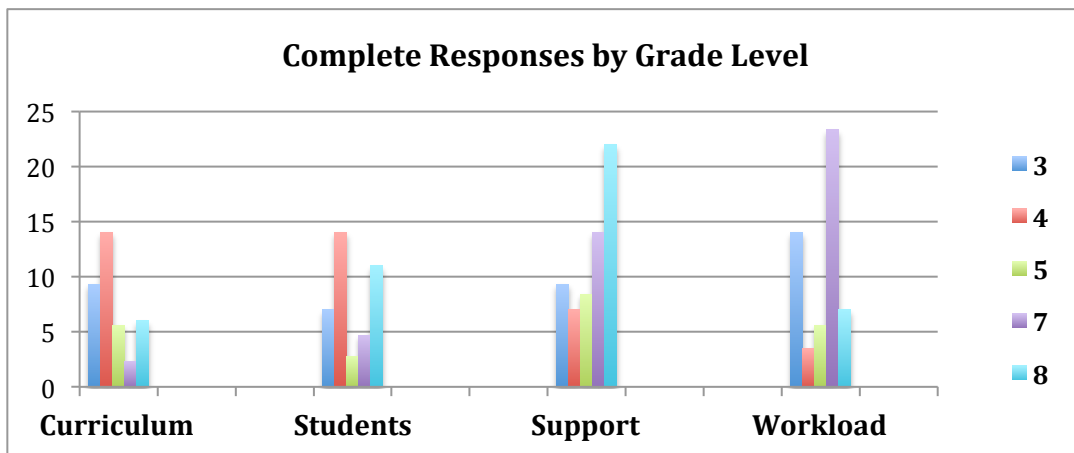

Figure 13. Complete responses by grade level

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter of this study recapped the intention of this study to investigate the stressors of urban teachers. It also included a summary of the methodology and a synopsis of the findings. Afterwards, there was a brief discussion of these results with regards to prior research findings and the implications for both urban schools and their teachers. Implications included practical suggestions that addressed the issues that participants found stressful. Finally, the chapter concluded with recommendations for additional research on the stress levels for teachers in urban schools that extend the findings from this study, as well as framing future studies.

Summary of the Study

This study aimed at uncovering the current stressors of elementary teachers in an urban school district. Research has shown that the profession of teaching is known to cause high levels of stress, which has potential consequences both physically and psychologically. High stress jobs have more absenteeism, increased anxiety with the likelihood of compromise to interpersonal relationships both at work and home. In 2001, Kyriacou, a renowned researcher on teacher stress, found that some common stressors were administration, time constraints, and issues with student discipline.

However, additional studies on urban schools outlined further problems with urban schools in high poverty areas. Issues common to urban school included overcrowded classes with many high need students, as well as a large ELL population. Other challenges that inner city schools face is recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. Up to one half of new teachers working in high-poverty urban schools leave

within their first five years of teaching. Also, these schools are more likely to hire teachers that have provisional, emergency, or temporary certification than teachers in non-urban schools. How have these changes that were intended to improve achievement affected teachers?

Review of Methodology

This study focused on the elementary teachers of ABC School District, utilizing five of the nine elementary schools that included either a K-8 or a K-5 student population located in the central Phoenix metropolitan area. The surrounding area revealed that the median family income was $30,044. The district receives Title I funds for all sites and in 2012-2013 approximately 25% of the student population was classified as ELL.

This research utilized interviews from small focus groups to uncover the prominent stressors in an urban elementary district from an in depth qualitative vantage. This study looked intensely at causal relationships with regards to prospective resolutions.

The focus groups consisted of four to five teachers from various site to create a small focus group, and 20 teachers were randomly selected to reflect a range of experience and grade level.

There were six open-ended questions that allowed teachers the freedom to express their personal feelings concerning occupational stress. For the final question, there was a 5-point scale to indicate a current level of stress. In addition to the responses received, there was a brief questionnaire regarding demographics that examined any similarities or patterns paired with individual responses. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The grounded theory was used to meaningfully analyze and code the response data for

context similarities and four major themes were revealed. Additionally, computer software assisted with the data analysis for frequency comparisons.

Summary of Results

Through analysis of the responses, the results were disaggregated into two sections. Part 1 discussed the past and current stressors of teachers in this study. Teacher responses were also examined by frequency analysis at both the different grade levels and experience level, which demonstrated observable patterns. Additionally, Part 1 described the participants' responses about how stress impacted others during their job performance.

In part of the results, the analysis of all responses when queried about past and current stressors revealed the formation of four main categories, *Support, Workload, Curriculum,* and *Students* emerged. By further disaggregating individual comments, several sub-categories were identified for each of the main themes through the coding process. In summation, the largest stressors for participants in this study of urban teachers were a large *Workload* and a lack of *Support*.

The middle school teachers responded with the highest frequency within these two areas. Elementary teachers, on the other hand, stated that their largest stressor was a deficiency in *Curriculum,* more specially the Common Core Standards, which included a lack of training of the standards. Elementary teachers edged out MS teachers with more concerns with *Students*, most notably with large class sizes for both grade bands.

When breaking down the responses from teachers at the experience level, it was evident that lack of *Support* dominated all levels of experience in total number of concerns. Teachers with the lowest amount of experience, expressed stress in all of the

major themes, although *Support* had the highest frequency of complaints. For more experienced teachers, *Workload,* was their second biggest stressor*,* and they were least stressed with *Students.*

In summation, the data revealed that the teachers in this urban school district currently experience high levels of occupational stress with an average level of 4.1 on a 5-point scale. Middle school teachers reported more stress than the teachers in the elementary grades. When responses were analyzed by both grade level and experience level, teachers stated that a lack of *Support* was the chief area of stress.

When teachers were asked about how stress impacted others in their job, most middle school teachers responded that their students recognized their stress, whereas few elementary teachers reported that their stress affected their students. Whilst participants responded to questions concerning whether stress affected their colleagues, results were similar. Middle school teachers claimed more often that stress had influenced their relationship with colleagues more than elementary teachers did. In summary, middle school teachers stated that their levels of stress were high enough to cause some type of negative response with both their students and their colleagues. Elementary teachers stated that their stress levels had a limited impact on either colleagues or students.

In Part 2 of the results section, responses indicated that teachers within all grade levels expressed that District ABC did initiate instructional support in some capacity. However, the teachers in this study felt that there were not many effective measures currently in place to help lesson stress. Some elementary teachers stated that the district offered some effective procedures, especially in the area of professional development,

however middle school teachers did not concede that there was much worthwhile support within the district. Both grade levels offered suggestions for improvement.

Limitations

One limitation that could have impacted data was the fact that some school sites had a large staff turnover that included administrators. Although, teachers in urban districts of high-poverty schools that serve minority low-income students have a higher rate of turnover than other schools (Hanushek et al., 2004), the ratio of teachers that left some schools in this study this year was higher than in past years. At the conclusion of the 2012-2013 school year, there were a high number of middle school teachers that resigned from their positions, and two of the three administrators at the middle school sites were removed as well. These circumstances may have influenced the stress levels of participants at those schools. However, this development was unforeseen and unpreventable.

Conclusions

The intention of this study was to reveal how teachers were coping under stress in an elementary urban school district. Using prior research that examined stressors of teachers in general, this study focused on urban teachers, with a cognate consideration that some common elements were known to be stressful, as well as considering recent accountability factors. This study also considered grade levels and experience levels to investigate the possibility of trends, if any. Therefore, the grade level bands were considered when the population for this study was generated, which is the reason for an equivalent number of elementary and middle school teachers.

The random selection of participants yielded a high number of teachers with few years of experience for this study. These circumstances exposed a mild dilemma when participants responded to the first question regarding past stressors. Therefore, when the results were compiled, responses for *Question 1* on past stressors were combined with *Question 2*, which investigated current stressors, which was discussed in Part 1 of the results section.

When teachers revealed their current and past stressors, the results were not unexpected. The research from Kyriacou (2001) and Dworkin (2009) has shown that there have been similarities in what causes teachers stress. Common stressors included student behavior, administration, heavy workload, especially in relation to salary, and even poor working conditions. Most of these previously identified stressors were likewise noted within this study. The most prevalent stressors that teachers in this district divulged were related to either heavy workload or working conditions. However, teachers reported these areas of stress with a slightly different account.

When participants described their stress in reference to *workload,* the examples given were related to the fact that they were not being able to complete their instructional responsibilities in a timely fashion, or that they were assigned additional tasks that they felt were non-essential to their core function as a teacher. The teachers stated that most of their stress from these responsibilities, whether they looked upon them as essential or not, stemmed from the fact that they were not given an opportunity to fulfill during their contracted day. One major issue was that teachers were not provided with adequate planning time, and that there simply was not enough time to complete all of their workload in a reasonable length of time, which forced them to either work longer hours,

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or take work home. However, at no time did any teacher mention the fact that they were not sufficiently compensated for their time.

Although there were many comments about the amount of time their job entailed, there were no complaints about salaries. This was an interesting phenomenon. In a 2003 study that compared teachers' salaries to other occupations with comparable education credentials, teachers earned approximately 14% less (Allegretto, Corcoran, and Mishel 2004). Additionally, the study revealed that teacher earnings have fallen in earning potential as well over the past few decades. Although research has shown that the salaries of teachers have actually declined in value, it was not a source of stress for these participants.

There were multiple concerns from teachers about the lack of *support* as a form of stress. While administration has been previously established as a source of stress, the data from this study agreed that the lack of administrative support was a chief area of concern. As stated, middle school teachers had more stress with administration, and most complaints pointed to inadequate or missing support in terms of policies, especially in relation to student discipline. These statements indicated that middle school teachers understood the potential behavior patterns of their students. Teachers were aware of physical altercations and insubordinate attitudes from adolescents. However, when a student's bad choices affected the learning, they felt unsupported by administrators to assist in defusing or penalizing the offenders. It is understandable that teachers experienced undue stress for being expected to perform the administrative duty of governing student discipline.

The other large concern for teachers was the administrative approach of sustaining instructional materials. This was another area of stress for mainly middle school teachers.   A few MS teachers stated that attempts to restore necessary supplies, such as technology repairs, were ignored. In order to deliver instruction in accordance with standards through technology integration, teachers felt that they should be provided with working technology. District ABC has incorporated interactive whiteboards in the majority of its classrooms with the expectation that teachers utilize this technology in their lessons on a regular basis. However, it was unclear on procedures relating to maintenance or upgrades of the equipment. This was evident when teachers explained their plight with servicing broken equipment from the site level up to the district level.

In terms of the other areas that participants expressed as other sources of stress, most of the problems can be traced to unclear or faulty procedures. When teachers discussed stressors pertaining to *students or curriculum*, many issues could be linked to current policies or protocol. There were some responses from teachers that indicated concerns over common core standards. Although, teachers stated that District ABC did provide professional development, there is obviously still a concern that some teachers need more training. Some participants were stressed over their evaluation tool, TOI, and their uneasiness with non-district employees implementing their evaluations with limited exposure to their instructional practices. The reality of this situation is that District ABC is linked to the TOI evaluation tool through a grant. The grant will expire in less than two years, however with increased accountability for teachers and more stringent measures imbedded in the new standards, teachers may need to adjust to a more comprehensive evaluation tool.

Some teachers complained that large class sizes were stressful, while others stated that they needed assistance with ELL students. Obvious solutions would be to limit class sizes and provide additional personnel for ELL students. That being said, some of these matters require funding to resolve, and this is a reality that all districts face, especially urban schools. Studies have shown that high poverty school communities tend to receive less funding (Snyder & Hoffman, 2001).

A report from the U.S. Department of Education in 2011 found that Title I Baker, B. D., Sciarra, D. G., & Farrie, D. (2010). *Is school funding fair? A national report card.* Education Law Center elementary schools received 46% less funding than non-Title I elementary schools, while 54% of Title I elementary schools received above average funding. Figure 14 demonstrates that Arizona provided increased funding to higher levels of impoverished students, however the per capita expenditures are overall lower than other Southwest states.
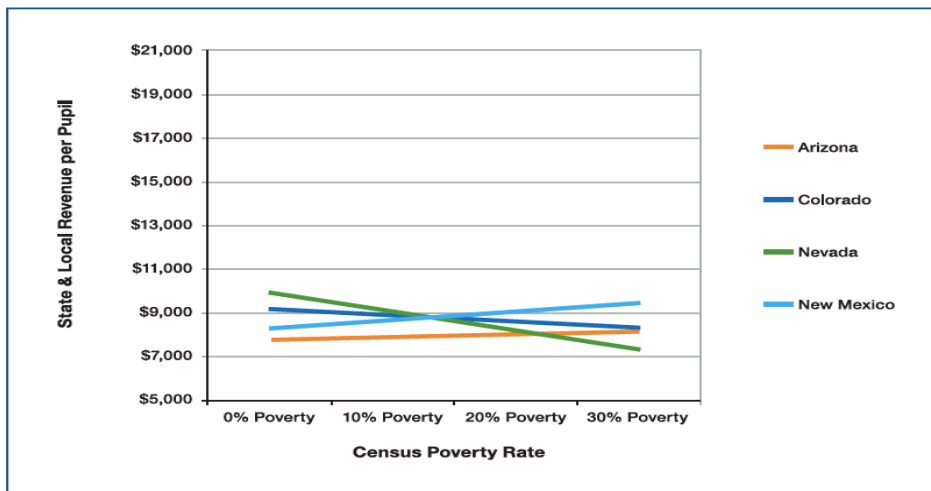

Figure 14. Southwest states' expenditures at poverty levels. Adapted from *A National Report Card,* by B. D. Baker, D. G. Sciarra, and D. Farrie, 2010, Education Law Center, Newark, New Jersey.

This data by the U.S. Department of Education from a 2005–2007 study on educational funding showed that Arizona students located in high poverty received less funding per capita than national averages of the same poverty levels (Figure 15). Therefore, with these current expenditures for Arizona urban schools within high poverty communities, it becomes challenging to implement some changes that require an increase monetary spending. This is a valid concern confronting District ABC. In order to increase personnel and decrease class sizes that would alleviate some of the stress on teachers in this district remain a challenge until additional monies become available.

	0%	10%	20%	30%
Arizona	7,801	7,906	8,012	8,120
United States	10,153	10,127	10,144	10,207

Figure 15. Funding distribution at the poverty levels. Adapted from *A National Report Card,* by B. D. Baker, D. G. Sciarra, and D. Farrie, 2010, Education Law Center, Newark, New Jersey.

Part 2 of this study asked the teachers to indicate existing policies or procedures that help mitigate stress for teachers. Although there were a few examples given about how the district provides effective professional development for curriculum, the majority of teachers reported that there were not effective procedures in place. The largest stressors, as conveyed by participants, related to *Workload* and *Support.*

The overwhelming request from teachers evolved around *Time.* They asked for more time to complete their work, and many teachers felt that they could improve their performance and efficacy if they were able to plan more thoroughly. There was also a request for more structured collaboration time with PLCs. The majority of teachers as a collective, no matter the grade level, or years of experience expressed high levels of

anxiety over the need for more unscheduled time.

The second appeal from teachers concerned *support*, which was mainly aligned with administration. There were clearly more issues of stress for middle school teachers within this category. The message from these teachers were twofold; lack of clear policies, and an absence of administrative support both as a professional and as a leader. The communication from these teachers' experiences was the frustration due to insubstantial leadership. Their suggestions to help mitigate their frustrations concerned the creation of concise policies, especially when pertaining to student discipline.

Another suggestion to enhance *support* was to be more transparent. Some teachers stated that they felt "in the dark" on many issues, such as required paperwork that they were not aware of prior to deadlines. Theses teachers, mainly from the middle schools, asked for increased communication about procedures in a timely manner. Their basic anxiety was their lack of knowledge, which they felt was an omission by their administrators. These frustrations stem from administrative protocols that can be remedied.

Lastly, teachers suggested that administrators include them with certain decisions. Several middle school teachers thought that by bringing teachers into some site-based discussions, would generate greater consensus and establish stronger commitments to school ventures. Ultimately, teachers conveyed that they wanted a voice at their schools. They wanted to feel valued and felt that by providing teachers a chance to participate in some decisions would generate more solidarity.

After analysis of many comments from teachers about current stressors, many remedies could potentially be resolved through modification in procedures or policies.

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There was some great insight and candidness from teachers about identifying the stressors, and how to relieve some of them. Some suggested solutions did not require spending; such as procedural changes to the organization. Changes like reconfiguring schedules and providing additional training with common core standards were all reasonable options to help teachers with stress. However, other changes, like decreasing class sizes were less feasible given budgetary constraints, as well as the modification of their teacher evaluation instrument.

In review of this study's goal to uncover current stressors for urban teachers, the results are not that uncommon to older studies through well-known researchers on stress like Kyriacou and Hanushek. Large class sizes and high workloads have been documented for years as common stressors. Administration has likewise been found to cause stress. All of these issues again surfaced for teachers in this study. In prior studies that targeted urban schools, such as Shernoff and colleagues' research from 2011, many similar issues emerged with participants in this study. The two areas that corresponded with participants from both studies were *Poverty* and *Accountability Policies.* The advantage of this study was that the methodology provided greater insight to areas of stress. The qualitative research approach utilizing open-ended questions allowed teachers to detail their personal frustrations in narrative accounts, which captured the cultural insight of this urban district and how teachers grappled with stress. With more a better awareness of the issues for teachers, it was feasible to propose viable solutions for reducing stress.

Insights

  With detailed narratives from the teachers in this urban district, sustainable solutions emerged that would help alleviate some areas of stress. As stated, there were changes to policies and protocols that the district office can recommend to all school sites. Transparency of procedures would greatly assist with informing teachers of expectations, and could also aid with time management routines.

  Teachers also requested more collaboration time with colleagues through PLCs. Since the inception of this study, District ABC has retained the services of a consultant to help with the implementation of PLCs. Professional learning communities provide benefits to improve educational organizations. PLC's help to build culture, which include beliefs, expectations, and behaviors through structure that organizes roles with set procedures. The consultant has helped to create learning communities on multiple levels; district, administrative, and school. Teachers have been asked to perform duties as a site leader to assist with the identification and resolution of the specific needs of their schools. This fortuitous development will continue to permit teachers to be heard, and provide feedback as part of a collective entity.

  Teachers recommended the creation of a formalized mentor program. Participants felt that due to the high numbers of incoming teachers that an effective mentorship would defer the unnecessary stress of unfamiliarity of school expectations. Studies have shown that schools that provide new teachers with comprehensive mentorships can help produce stability with the customary routines of the educational institution.

  One study by Harvard University revealed that districts or schools must meet certain needs in order to increase a teacher's effectiveness, which is the ultimate goal.

Their study titled, "The Strategic Data Project," analyzed and researched data about teacher needs from Delaware for two years. The combined efforts of Harvard University and Delaware's Department of Education worked with new teachers through a mentor program to assist them with structured support. The findings compared teachers' effectiveness patterns utilizing a combination of teacher, school, and student characteristics. This study revealed eight key findings and two of these discoveries address some of the characteristics of District ABC.

1. High-poverty schools have a disproportionately larger share of new hires than low-poverty schools.

2. Less experienced teachers are assigned to lower-performing students.

Both of these statements are applicable to District ABC. As shown in this study, there was a high population of new teachers, and the schools included a high-poverty population of students.

"Schools with the greatest proportion of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch have 74% more novice teachers than schools with the lowest proportion of subsidized lunch students. These high-poverty schools also receive more new hires with prior teaching experience." (Strategic Data Project: Harvard University, 2013)

This two-year study affirmed the importance of executing an effective mentor program at District ABC. Although, there is the new teacher program, BEGIN in operation, it only provides periodic guidance at the district level. A successful mentor program can assist at the site level with concerns about instruction and assessment, classroom management, and generally serve as a resource for other concerns that new

teachers encounter. District ABC would profit in the long term from the benefits of an effective program.

One other element for this district to consider to lessen stress for its teachers is the process for implementing changes. District ABC, as with all schools, undergoes changes more than other institutional organizations. One consideration to assist with the implementation of these changes is through the use of a systemic model for change.

In order to utilize the appropriate model, one must determine the type of change needed. One process to view change is through the designs of Waters, Marzano, and McNulty's (2003) change models as defined by either first-order change, or second-order change. Waters et al. (2005) defined first-order change as a modification process. In order to improve a process that is already established, yet requires adjustments; this model may be a viable solution. For changes that are new or transformational, the second-order change model is a better option. This formalized process requires complete behavior modifications and a complete shift from an old system. This model also will require training to understand and execute a new process effectively. District ABC may need to assess their areas of focus, and determine if the use of a more systemic change model would improve any existing or new changes that would satisfy teachers' needs while alleviating stress.

Future Research

This study focused on the stressors of urban teachers and successfully uncovered critical areas that teachers found stressful. The advantage of this study over similar quantitative research studies was the acquisition of this qualitative data. Through qualitative research using the grounded theory, rich commentary revealed components of

stress that characterized the frustrations of teachers in an urban setting of high poverty. Participants offered their insight for solutions that may be easily remedied, and those that are not so quickly resolved. Teachers in this study were candid and forthright, which allowed details to emerge concerning their occupational stress. There were also plausible suggestions from teachers that could be implemented if the district elected to do so.

Consideration for future research may be to extend the study on the stress of urban teachers. There is the possibility for a study that continues to reexamine the stress of teachers after changes to mitigate known stressors have occurred within the schools. In addition, the process for implementing those transformations, and the systemic changes would serve as a valuable asset to other urban schools that may be experiencing similar concerns related to teacher stress. There is the potential for a longitudinal study that would encompass the entire process from the analysis of teacher stressors through the evaluation of corrective actions succeeding full implementation. Qualitative design research is preferable since the results provide insightful data for in-depth analysis.

As research has shown, occupational stress is counterproductive, and can adversely impact teachers. Prolonged stress can harm their instructional effectiveness, which can be consequentially crippling to the education of children if left unresolved. Although there are areas in education that cannot be modified, such as accountability provisions, schools can make adjustments in training to produce positive outcomes. As Kyriacou suggested after his 2001 study, this important topic that has the potential to affect educational outcomes, and therefore warrants revisiting.

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APPENDIX A

STRESS FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Begin with a brief overview of study and establish norms of focus group.

Question 1.
Let's begin with some background information.
What grade do you teach and how many years of teaching experience do you have?
Question 2.
Thinking back over your teaching career, what have been some of the sources of stress in the past?
How did these factors affect your work?
How has stress affected your attitude towards teaching?
Question 3.
What are the current sources of stress in your work?
How does stress affect you now?
How does your stress affect other teachers?
How does your stress affect your students?
Would you say that your stress level as a teacher has increased over time? If yes, how so?
Question 4.
How does the district or school site provide support for teachers to mitigate factors that are causing stress for teachers?
Question 5.
If you were in a position to develop or recommend strategies for supporting teachers and alleviating their stress, what would you do?
Question 6.
What is your single most significant area of stress? If you were to assign a value, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how would you rate your current level of stress?

APPENDIX B

ISAAC SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER

ISAAC SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5
3348 West McDowell Road
Phoenix, Arizona 85009-2416
602-455-6700 Fax 602-278-1693
Mario Ventura, Ed.D.
Superintendent

February 11, 2013

To Sherry Ayala:

This letter confirms that Isaac Elementary School District will grant permission for your research on the stress level of teachers to be performed within our schools. Your dissertation proposal titled, *Stress in Schools: What are the current stressors of urban elementary teachers in Arizona?* is approved with two stipulations.

1. Teachers are fully aware that their participation is completely voluntary and that the district has no direct involvement with this study.

2. The identity and confidentiality of teacher participation will be guarded during all phases of your study including the identity of the Isaac School District.

Please provide a copy of this letter to principals and teachers to confirm the district's permission before beginning your interviews for your research. Good luck with your endeavor and please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further assistance.

Susan Bejarano
Associate Superintendent
Isaac Elementary School District #5

APPENDIX C

REQUEST FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear Principal   ,

I am an educational graduate student at Arizona State University conducting my

dissertation research. My study focuses on the current stressors of teachers in urban

schools. The superintendent of Isaac District has approved my study.

I am seeking 3-5 teachers from several schools for a focus group. The intention of the

focus group is to have an in-depth conversation concerning the most prevalent stressors

in their teaching positions. The focus group will meet one time for approximately 60

minutes. My target goal for interview completion is _____.

I would like to thank you for your assistance with this request. I will follow up this letter

with an email to proceed with this request upon your permission. Please feel free to

contact me to discuss any questions or concerns regarding this project. I can be reached at

(480) 732-1516 or email sayala@asu.edu.

Thank you,

Sherry L. Ayala

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO BE INTERVIEWED IN FOCUS GROUP

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT STRESSORS FOR TEACHERS IN URBAN SCHOOLS?

Date:

Dear Elementary Teacher:

In my study, I need between 3-5 teachers for each focus group for an in-depth discussion on teachers stress. With permission, I will audiotape the conversations. If you give permission to be taped, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped. Recordings will be destroyed after research completion.

If you volunteer for the focus group interview, all identities will be completely masked, however confidentiality outside of the group cannot be fully controlled by other participants. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me, Sherry Ayala at sayala@asu.edu or Dr. Spencer at dspencer@asu.edu.

Please sign the permission with your contact information and I will be in touch with you to schedule the focus group session. I thank you for your assistance with this endeavor. Results of the study will be accessible upon completion.

Sherry Ayala
sayala@asu.edu
480-732-1516

By signing below you are agreeing to participate in a focus group.

Name _____

_____   _____
Signature   Date
Contact information   email _____   Phone _____

By signing below, you are agreeing to be audiotaped.

 Signature_____   Date _____