

EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER  
RETENTION: A STUDY OF AN  
ORCHESTRA PROGRAM STAFF

By

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Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore factors that lead to teachers remaining in the same position within a program at a suburban high school in a Midwestern state for the majority of their career despite high turnover rates in the state and within this district. This study used purposeful sampling to gain a better understanding of teacher perceptions of the factors that influenced them to remain in their current positions. The study participants were eight teachers who had taught in the orchestra program during their career, with three having recently retired. Data was primarily collected through participant interviews with the orchestra teachers. A number of prominent themes emerged from the interviews, consisting of respect, team-teaching, flexibility, freedom, support, and performing. It was uncanny how many responses from different participants were extremely similar and sometimes matched word for word. The Person-Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit) was identified prior to conducting the study and provided a lens through which the data could be analyzed. Characteristics of the P-E Fit Theory consist of Personal (biological needs, psychological needs, values, goals, abilities, and personality) and Environmental (intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, job demands, cultural values, and character of other individuals) factors. Findings show that a good fit between the person and the environment can have a positive impact on a teacher remaining in the same teaching position for a long duration. The orchestra staff confirmed that the congruence of personal and environmental factors allowed for long and fulfilling teaching careers to occur. Many of the factors were aligned so strongly that they were capable of fitting into multiple characteristic categories. Main takeaways from the study are that the fit of the team members really matters; support and autonomy for teachers from administrators is very important; support from colleagues can be a major positive; team-teaching is an extremely valuable tool to allow for continued individual growth and curricular alignment; and the informal vetting of potential future candidates greatly aides in the transition from retiring teachers to newly hired ones. Additional research could focus on other school districts and programs from other curricular areas, as well as whether hiring the most accomplished candidate versus the one that fits with the existing team the best results in the best and most stable learning environment.

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## CHAPTER I

### EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER RETENTION: A STUDY OF AN ORCHESTRA PROGRAM STAFF

In this era of heightened scrutiny of public schools, the importance of having a high-quality teacher in every classroom has never been more important. Numerous studies have confirmed that the most important factor contributing to student success is the effectiveness of instruction (Bright, 2011; Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). With evaluations of schools and districts sometimes based on narrow outcomes such as student test scores, ensuring a school system possesses a strong roster of teachers in every building is currently one of the essential job functions of a superintendent.

According to Shakrani (2008), one of the main causes of inadequate school performance is the inability to appropriately staff classrooms with qualified instructors. This inability is largely due to a shortage of teachers across the nation (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Gardner, 2010). With approximately 50% of teachers leaving the profession within their first five years, maintaining a pool of high-quality teachers is becoming more difficult (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Perda, 2012; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Growing the capacity of building leaders to

increase retention of quality teachers and further teacher career longevity could result in many positive benefits for a district and the education system overall.

Much research has studied job longevity and the factors leading to teachers staying in their same position (Beasley, 2013; Bobek, 2002; Brown, 1997; Gardner, 2010; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter & Meisels, 2007; Kovac, 2013). Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) found that teachers stay in the profession longer if the school workplace has plans in place to enhance the environment and overall working conditions. Several studies determined a teacher must possess or develop the characteristic of being resilient to remain in the education profession (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Bobek, 2002). According to Buchanan et al. (2013), teachers experience success during their early years and as they become better teachers, educators are more likely to stay in the profession. This finding provides insight for educational leaders as they strive to retain teachers through the first, initial stages of their careers.

While research indicates that many teachers leave the profession within the first five years, overall, music teachers tend to remain in the same position at a higher rate than their colleagues do in other departments (Gardner, 2010; Hancock, 2009; Hancock, 2016; Russell, 2008). An investigation found that it is important for teachers in the Arts to maintain their love of their Art as well as their ability to participate in the act of being an Artist (Brown, 1997). Specifically with music teachers, factors leading to greater job satisfaction and higher retention rates include administrative support, student participation, grade-level taught, student behavior, working conditions, and salary (Bryant, 2012; Gardner, 2010; Tehseen, 2015). Though most of these factors are true for educators in other fields and not just music teachers, two specific aspects of music programs can influence whether a teacher stays or

leaves: the amount of student participation and whether a music program is generally perceived as either successful or not. Retaining quality teachers in all classrooms, both music and not-music, has potential to benefit students as dedicated, committed teachers strive to bring out the best in students. Therefore, being knowledgeable regarding factors influencing a teacher's decision to stay or leave is important for educational leaders.

Many efforts have been made to discover ways to promote teacher retention. Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, and Meisels (2007) stated, "Ideally, one would identify teachers most likely to resign while they are still teaching, and then meet their needs" (p. 786). Their work suggested that having the ability to address decreased teacher satisfaction or other factors leading to teacher attrition, could offer the potential to minimize staff turnover, resulting in higher retention rates, teacher career longevity, and possible increased educational results. Goldhaber, Gross, and Player (2011) found that the most effective teachers remain both in teaching and in the same school for the longest tenure suggesting that, when teachers experience success, they are more likely to remain. Gaining an understanding of factors that lead to teachers leaving or staying in education could provide educational leaders the insight needed to retain more teachers. With less teachers departing education, more experienced teachers would exist, thus raising the likelihood or possibility of increasing student performance.

### **Problem Statement**

Ingersoll (2007) suggested that there is a direct link between student achievement and teacher quality. "Research continues to confirm what intuition has told many of us for years: teacher quality has a bigger impact on student learning than any other factor in a school" (Hassel, Kowal, Ableidinger, & Hassel, 2011, p. 1). However, research has shown that as

many as 50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Perda, 2012; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). According to Shakrani (2008), a pivotal cause of low student academic performance is a teacher shortage and the inability of schools to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers.

Shakrani (2008) stated that on average, over 1,000 teachers across the country leave the field of teaching every single school day, resulting in substantial turnover rates in many districts. Therefore, an anomaly exists in situations where, even though high teacher turnover rates exist in a district overall, some teachers in the same district choose to stay in the profession for a long period of time, often in the same position. An even rarer situation occurs when all teachers in a certain program or department choose to stay for an extended period, creating continuity and sustainability in program goals. A potential explanation for the longevity in a program may be that when positive factors exist and a "good fit" occurs, teachers may remain in their positions at a higher rate. If all faculty within a program work well together and experience "good fit," the result may be extended tenure for all faculty members.

Extensive research has been conducted to investigate reasons why teachers stay in or leave a position; however, very little has explored the factors that led to a stable program staff remaining as a team for an extended duration (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Beasley, 2013; Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Bobek, 2002; Brion, 2015; Brown, 1997; Buchanan et al., 2013; Gardner, 2010; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Hancock, 2016; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007; Miller, 2010; Scheib, 2006; Scheopner, 2010; Williby, 2004).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that lead to teachers remaining in the same position within a program at a suburban high school in a Midwestern state for the majority of their career despite high turnover rates in the state and within this district.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

- 1) What are teacher perceptions about why they have remained in the same position within the same program for an extended period of time?
- 2) What are teacher perceptions about why all faculty in the program have remained together for an extended period of time?
- 3) What are teacher perceptions about the factors that have the greatest influence on teacher retention?
- 4) What challenges have this group of teachers faced that have threatened teacher retention?
- 5) How have they overcome these challenges?
- 6) How do Person-Environment Fit Theory factors explain job longevity in the orchestra program?

## **Theoretical Framework**

Constructivism is the epistemological perspective informing the study.

Constructivism is defined as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). “Research is, after all, producing knowledge

about the world – in our case, the world of educational practice” (Merriam, 1998, p. 3). The interaction between human beings and their world, in this case teachers and the educational environment, are a crucial element in this study. Gaining understanding of how these elements interact with each other and the importance they play for each individual is paramount. In tandem with the factors impacting a decision by teachers to stay in their position or leave, this study will greatly benefit from the constructivist perspective.

Because a qualitative case study was conducted, identification of a theory can occur prior to a study (Creswell, 2009) and provide a lens through which to interpret and analyze data. Because Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Theory explains the alignment between personal and environmental characteristics, it may be a helpful framework for explaining findings in this study. P-E Fit Theory explains the compatibility that occurs when the individual and work environment characteristics are well-matched (Dawis, 1992; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). French et al. (1982) and Kristof-Brown and Guay (2011) defined factors often included as personal and environmental characteristics that should be included when considering “fit.” These characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Personal and Environmental Factors of the Person-Environment Fit Theory*

<u>Personal Factors</u>	<u>Environmental Factors</u>
Biological Needs	Intrinsic Rewards
Psychological Needs	Extrinsic Rewards

Values	Job Demands
Goals	Cultural Values
Abilities	Character of other Individuals

Personality

---

*Note.* Adapted from Kristof-Brown, A. & Guay, R. P. (2011). Maintaining, expanding, and contracting the organization. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA Handbooks in Psychology* (pp. 3-50). Washington, DC: American Psychology Association.

These factors and the Person-Environment Fit Theory will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Worth noting is how these factors interrelate and how the congruence of items or lack thereof could potentially result in greater job satisfaction and ideally job longevity.

**Research Design**

The research design for this study was a qualitative case study. Because in-depth, nuanced perceptions and personal feelings are an important aspect of the factors influencing teacher retention, interviewing subjects to reveal “many more variables of interest than data points” (Yin, 2002, p. 14) was crucial for this study. Yin also stated that a case study allows for the study to address the deeper “how” or “why” questions concerning the area of focus, resulting in a potential for deeper comprehension of the phenomenon.

Purposeful sampling was used in this study to gain a better understanding of these teachers’ perceptions of factors that influenced them to remain in their current positions. Because a specific orchestra program was the focus of investigation, selection criteria for the sample relied upon an individuals’ involvement with the program. Only those participating in the program of focus were selected as part of the purposeful sample. Data from multiple sources was collected. Interview data was collected through individual interviews with each

of the eight orchestra teachers. For the purpose of triangulation, additional data was gathered through observations and document analysis. By collecting data from multiple sources, a thick, rich description was drawn. During the course of the interviews, open-ended questions were asked in an effort to compel more thoughtful and in-depth responses. A copy of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix A.

Trustworthiness was ensured by utilizing triangulation of data. Credibility, transferability, conformity, and dependability were established via data triangulation. Data was collected from a variety of sources over a prolonged period to provide credibility for this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **To Practice**

Only by recruiting and then retaining the great minds of the next generation will education thrive beyond our years in the profession. Gaining a greater understanding of teacher perceptions of factors influencing their decisions to stay or leave a teaching position could reap potential benefits for the future of education by providing insight into factors that influenced these teachers to remain in their current positions for extended periods of time. Gardner claims that “it can take as many as 11 hires to find just one irreplaceable teacher” (2012, p.112). As leaders gain a better understanding of teacher motivation, and how the environment can support teacher motivation, they are more likely to not only potentially hire candidates who fit the specific environment better, but also retain more quality educators in the educational system.

#### **To Research**



Previous research on the impact of teacher retention on the overall educational system mostly focuses on the reasons that teachers choose to leave the profession rather than the reasons they choose to stay. Understanding teacher perceptions about factors that influence them, not only to remain in the profession, but also to remain in the same program throughout most of their careers can provide important insight into the research on teacher retention and job satisfaction.

### **To Theory**

Theories on educational topics are plentiful. Analyzing the role of personal and environmental factors of Person-Environment Fit Theory in teacher retention will provide us with a greater understanding of the scope and application of P-E Fit Theory in education regarding teacher retention. “Organizations and their members have a fundamental stake in how well characteristics of the person and the environment of the organization fit one another” (Caplan, 1987, p.248). Garnering a deeper grasp of the emerging factors apparent in this study will assist in a greater understanding of the interactive elements of the P-E Fit Theory.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Beginning Teacher.* A beginning teacher can be defined as a teacher in the first three years of their career who has not yet achieved tenure (Lortie, 2002).

*Person-Environment Fit Theory.* The compatibility that occurs when the individual and work environment characteristics are well matched (Dawis, 1992; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987).

*Person-Environment Fit Theory Personal Factors.* Biological/Psychological needs, Values, Goals, Abilities, Personality (French, et al., 1982 & Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011).

*Person-Environment Fit Theory Environmental Factors.* Intrinsic/Extrinsic Rewards, Demands of the Job, Cultural Values, Characteristics of other individuals in the social environment (French, et al., 1982 & Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011).

*Teacher Attrition.* Teacher attrition was defined by Ingersoll (2001) as “those who leave the occupation of teaching altogether” (p. 503).

*Teacher Retention.* Teacher retention can be referred to as the ability of a school system to keep teachers employed in the system (Ingersoll, 2001). Darling-Hammond (2003) also defined teacher retention as a teacher who remains in the teaching profession for at least five years.

### **Summary and Organization of the Study**

In summary, having a high-quality teacher in every classroom across the country is critical for educational success. In order for schools and students to reap maximum benefits from teachers, retaining quality educators is imperative for sustained, long-term viability of the education system. Gaining knowledge regarding the factors impacting teacher retention through the application of a Person-Environment Fit Theory viewpoint, and hypothetically increasing retention rates could greatly benefit educational administrators and in turn, generations of students.

This study was organized in five chapters. Chapter I provided an overall introduction to the study with the main elements including the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the identification of research questions, discussion of the Person-Environment Fit

Theory, procedures of the study, significance of the study, and definitions of relevant terms for the study.

Chapter II offers a deep review of the relevant literature that will assist in greater understanding of the research content. The following literature topics are addressed: the importance of teacher quality, factors and trends affecting teacher longevity, factors and trends affecting teacher shortages, longevity and retention of music teachers, and Person-Environment Fit Theory.

Chapter III provides a detailed explanation of the research methods and procedures utilized in this study including data collection and data analysis techniques. Researcher bias, background and ethical considerations are also discussed. Additionally, trustworthiness of findings and study limitations are covered.

Chapter IV presents findings from the data and provides a full description of both research site and participants. All findings are presented in detail.

Chapter V concludes the study with researcher interpretations of the findings through the lens of the Person-Environment Fit Theory (French et al., 1982; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011), study implications, and overall conclusions. Study implications include the significance of the study for three audiences: practitioners, researchers, and theoreticians. Recommendations for future research are also provided.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Topics discussed in this literature review include: (1) the importance of teacher quality and the difference a classroom teacher makes; (2) career longevity in the education profession and benefits of retaining teachers; (3) trends and factors of teacher longevity; (4) trends and factors affecting teacher shortages; and (5) the Person-Environment Fit Theory. The goals of this literature review are: (1) to establish the need to retain quality classroom teachers; (2) to illustrate the trends and factors that influence teacher retention; (3) to illuminate that the fit of the person and environment are important for teacher retention; and (4) to demonstrate the need for this study.

#### **Introduction**

Numerous studies have confirmed that the most important factor contributing to student success is the effectiveness of instruction (Bright, 2011; Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Rothstein (2004) further tied the impact a good teacher can have on student achievement by stating, "Many educators have come to believe that improvement in teacher quality can be so dramatic that it can fully close the achievement gap" (p. 71). In this era of

heightened scrutiny of public schools, the importance of having a high-quality teacher in every classroom has never been more important. Because schools and entire districts are evaluated based on student test scores, ensuring a district has a strong roster of teachers in every building is currently one of the essential job functions of educational administrators. Unfortunately, with approximately 50% of teachers leaving the profession within their first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Perda, 2012; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003), this duty of maintaining a pool of high-quality teachers has become increasingly more difficult. Teacher retention is a critical issue for the education system nationwide and determining ways to retain teachers in the education profession could have a strong impact on schools, students, and schools for years to come.

### **Importance of Teacher Quality – The Difference a Teacher Makes**

When investigating the role of teacher retention in improving student achievement, Ingersoll (2007) found that teacher quality is directly associated with student achievement. Anecdotally, most adults can think back to their educational experience and remember how a teacher had a significant impact on their learning, sometimes a positive impact and sometimes not. A study looking into the ramifications of high teacher turnover noted that in schools consistently staffed with inexperienced beginner teachers, student achievement is diminished (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2007). Assuming curriculum is somewhat standard between classrooms, the quality of the teacher is the linchpin that can make learning probable or sometimes unlikely.

Many challenges exist, however, to maintaining a team of qualified teachers in a school or district. For example, “One of the pivotal causes of inadequate school academic performance is a teacher shortage and the resulting inability of schools to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers” (Shakrani, 2008, p. 1). The incidental price of losing teachers includes reduced program stability, student achievement, and teacher quality (Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004). The schools often in the most need of high-quality educators often have the highest concentrations of inexperienced teachers due to high turnover (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2007). These lower performing schools rarely close the student achievement gap because they never close the teacher quality gap (Shakrani, 2008). Hughes (2014) suggested that careful and strategic hiring of high-quality individuals provides a critical opportunity to improve an organization. On the other hand, Clement (2009) noted that poor hiring practices can affect student learning, school and district success, and can damage a school’s culture. Placing and keeping a quality educator in every classroom is important for educational leaders and is said to be the most important thing a K-12 school administrator does (Hughes, 2014).

### **Career Longevity and Benefits**

Extensive research has shown the importance of a quality teacher in the educational process. An important element of providing a successful educational system for communities might not only focus on getting a quality teacher, but successful strategies exist to keep them. Furthermore, understanding teacher longevity and the beneficial impact it may have on education is worthy of further consideration.

### ***Teachers improve over time with experience***

If having a quality teacher in every classroom is a priority for administrators, keeping the effective ones in place can play an even larger role in maintaining or even raising student performance. The Australian Education Union (2006), through a survey of 1,200 early career teachers, found that 45% thought they did not believe they would still be working in education 10 years in the future. This perception is problematic due to the fact that “it is imperative not only to attract good candidates into teacher education, but also to retain them beyond the first five years of their careers” (Santoro, Pietsch, & Borg, 2012, p. 585). Since so many educators believe they will leave the profession in the future, it is important to seek a greater understanding of the factors affecting teacher retention. A study looking at early career teachers found that “during their early years, as they become better teachers they also become increasingly likely to stay in the profession” (Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, & Burke, 2013, p. 124).

### ***Increased teacher retention can lead to raised teacher quality***

If the profession can get teachers through the first phases of difficulties in their career, the more likely education is to have quality, experienced teachers. “With each passing year a teacher is less likely to leave the profession” (Scheib, 2006, p. 5). Bronte (1995) stated that “what matters is your native ability for the career, your interest in it, and an environment that permits you to function well” (p. 8). Additionally, Bronte (1995) pointed out that our idea of career longevity has evolved over the past century as aging and life expectancy have dramatically increased. It is common to have a portion of experienced teachers in the profession but knowing what makes an educator stay in

education or remain at a building site for extended periods could benefit educational leaders seeking quality staff members.

### **Factors and Trends Affecting Teacher Longevity**

While understanding teacher longevity is important, gaining a deeper understanding of the factors and trends that can impact longevity seems prudent. Research shows a number of elements can affect teacher longevity. For this study, investigating music teacher longevity is also relevant.

#### ***Reasons for departure***

If quality teachers can positively impact educational outcomes and in general, teachers with more experience are more likely to be successful, teacher retention is an extremely important issue that could potentially have a large impact on the quality of any school or district. In order to retain more teachers, knowing the factors that influence a teachers' decision to stay with or leave a job could be very helpful for administrators and those responsible for teachers. Santoro, Pietsch, and Borg (2012) identified some of the reasons for departure, which include: excessive workload, perceived low status of the profession, a mismatch between expectations and realities, seeking new challenges, and real life intrusions like marriage, moving, or a child. A confounding issue of teacher retention is the push for accountability and an overall increased demand and expectation placed on teachers. A number of school districts in Oklahoma have slowly been allowing increased headcounts for both elementary and secondary classes over the past decade. Many teachers are asked to do more with less while their classrooms are at full capacity, if not over capacity.

#### ***Low teacher pay and poor treatment of educators***



Accepting a stagnant salary in a difficult economical era is one issue most professionals understand and can cope with, though begrudgingly. Unfortunately, increasing work demand and putting accountability measures in place without increased pay are two additional items most professionals in any line of work would struggle to accept. Additionally, increased expectations for an inclusive classroom, fewer resources to aide in student learning, relying on school-aged students to perform well on standardized tests, and larger class sizes are more reasons making it easy to see why states are struggling to retain a qualified educator in every classroom. In fact, as an example of this deficiency of qualified teacher candidates, the Oklahoma State School Board of Education has made accommodations for granting emergency teaching certificates to candidates with no instructional education experience whatsoever. As of 2018, the state had granted well over 2,000 requests for emergency alternative teacher certificates (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2020). This demonstrates an example of the level of desperation the state and country are currently experiencing regarding the recruitment and retaining of not just high-quality educators, but merely educators who are licensed.

### ***Focus on beginning teachers***

Giving teachers a pathway of progress to follow with “a well-articulated promotion ladder using pay, position, and level of responsibility to denote progress through various stages of their career would give teachers a broader and more visible range of opportunities that may aid in retention” (Bobek, 2002, p. 204). Initial research by Bronte (1995) showed that important building blocks for success are your ability, your interest, and a supportive environment. Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) found “the factors

that were most influential for teacher retention were predominantly related to the work environment and included the working and school conditions as well as the curriculum and extraneous demands” (p. 30). For early career teachers, Schuck, Brady, and Griffin (2005) identified school culture as a major determinant of their job satisfaction. Similarly, Hearn (2009) found that band directors who were the most compatible with their environment were the most likely to attain maximum career tenure in their position.

### ***Retain teachers at one site or in one district***

Research shows “...teachers who are more effective, holding all else equal, are less likely to seek transfer” (Boyd, et al., 2011, p. 109), thus resulting in the better teachers staying in their positions for longer than the less effective teachers. This phenomenon of successful teachers remaining in their same positions makes it that much more difficult to get quality teachers into classrooms in buildings where they are needed the most. However, though high-quality teachers staying in the same position for a long duration will not help struggling schools, the stability and consistency is beneficial for the school able to keep them in place. It is good to know that successful and long-tenured teachers are more likely to remain in the same position, but the most poignant item from this study shows that teachers who are less likely to depart the school are also the teachers who have the highest value-add regarding student achievement. The results from this study underscore the importance of researching teacher retention: the more experienced and successful teachers who positively affect student achievement are the motivation behind a desire to increase teacher retention rates.

### ***Music Teacher/Fine Arts Teacher Longevity***

For this study, the retention of music teachers is an area of focus and of utmost importance. “Teacher shortages have been identified in particular regions of the country, certain types of schools, and specific subject areas, including music (National Association of Schools of Music, 2002, p. 2). Though music teachers are in the general field of education, their curricular area has some unique subculture aspects all to itself. Additionally, the factors that influence a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession or to leave though similar, may differ some from general classroom teachers due to these variances. For instance, Bryant (2012) showed significant indicators of job satisfaction for band and orchestra teachers are administrative support, student participation, and salary. A high-quality and supportive building leader may greatly impact music teacher longevity. Slightly over 20 percent of music teachers who leave their position state dissatisfaction with administrator support is the most important reason for leaving (Hancock, 2016). The more music teachers feel support from their administrators, the less likely they are to leave their position for another teaching job or leave the profession altogether (Gardner, 2010). By creating a positive professional work environment where teachers are involved in the decision-making processes, school administrators may be able to limit unwanted migration and departures (Russell, 2008). Gardner (2010) also found that the presence of a music supervisor in the district may assist building administrators in supporting their building music teachers and as a result having a positive impact on their desire to remain in their position. Although administrative support and salary may be factors influencing teachers in all curricular areas, student participation is often not even a consideration for a general classroom teacher who is assigned their roster of students; whereas band and orchestra teachers must most

commonly recruit their own membership. Strength of instrumental programs are often determined in part by the total enrollment and overall level of student participation.

### ***Travelling teachers***

Another factor of job satisfaction and longevity unique to secondary instrumental music teachers is they are often itinerant teachers shared between multiple buildings. Sharing music teachers in this manner allows multiple schools to offer a full experience in band or orchestra for students at their site without necessarily having to allocate a full teaching position for the music program. Some districts also commonly utilize certain itinerant teachers to float around the district between several buildings in order to assist site-based instructors with larger classes, or to offer a more focused instrument-specific master class-type level of instruction. “A teaching schedule that is divided between multiple buildings can create a unique set of challenges...including travel between buildings, reporting to multiple administrators, and attending numerous faculty meetings (Gardner, 2010, p. 117). That explains why Gardner (2010) found one of the highest rated reasons teachers gave for leaving a position was for a better teaching assignment. Demonstrating this phenomenon, Hancock (2009) found that on average ten percent of public school music teachers leave a position each year due to what he termed “migration,” meaning they simply moved from one music teaching position to another, often within the same school district. This migration may be the music teacher’s profession career ladder, allowing educators to upgrade to schools where increased resources, support, or salary are more abundant (Madsen & Hancock, 2002). As Meister (2012, p.2) puts it, “Job-hopping can speed career advancement...and job-hopping can also lead to greater job fulfillment.”

### ***Music teachers are also artists***

Brown (1997) found that a love for the actual craft of the art added to the teacher's ability to keep the education in the Art field fresh and relevant, not getting lost or distracted by possible other educational issues. Scheib (2006) adds that if fine arts teachers hold and value their identities as artists, then it stands to reason that to keep them holistically fulfilled with their arts teaching career, their identity as artists should also be nourished.

### ***Music teachers often collaborate***

One aspect unique to public school music teachers, and especially secondary music directors, is the frequent observation of each other teaching as well as an overarching collaborative tone to work in their department. This may be caused by a number of factors, but co-teaching, which is often common among secondary music departments may be one activity responsible for this heightened collaborative and interactive approach to education. "Individuals grow through and toward human connections that foster mutual support" (Doney, 2013, p. 648). Supporting that claim, Buchanan et al. (2013) stated "...teachers find it more amenable for meeting and learning from other teachers...(and) highlighted the value of meeting with peers..." (p. 121). In another study, newer teachers choosing to leave education indicated the availability of sharing planning and resources with experienced teachers may have influenced them to remain in the profession (Burke, Aubusson, Schuck, & Buchanan, 2015). Similarly, in this same study, isolation was labeled as a factor influencing teacher's decisions to leave, underscoring the importance of this collaborative phenomenon existing among secondary

music staff members. Collaborative environments are said to allow for maximum interaction between teachers, thus creating the opportunity for new educators to shape their own desired learning opportunities (Weiss, 1999). New teachers perceiving this feeling of being connected to the group may be a major factor influencing music teacher longevity.

### **Factors and Trends Affecting Teacher Shortage**

Though many factors influence teacher longevity, the same also applies to a shortage of teachers. These factors may cause teachers shortages. Investigating the trends and factors affecting the shortage of teachers is also a valuable step in this study.

#### ***Teacher shortage***

In a somewhat eye-opening statistic, it is estimated that nearly 1,000 teachers leave the field of teaching in the United States every school day (Shakrani, 2008). “The problem is not finding enough teachers to do the job – the problem is keeping them in our schools” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2007, p. 2). Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) estimated, with the help of the Australian Associated Press that by 2016 there would be a world-wide shortage of 18 million teachers. Though it is not verified that we have reached that threshold, one only has to observe the increase to over 3,000 emergency teacher certificates being granted by the state of Oklahoma in both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years to unqualified individuals to see that a teacher shortage exists and is growing every year (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2020). Additionally, “America’s schools are struggling with a growing teacher dropout problem that is costing the nation over seven billion dollars a year” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2007, p. 1).

### ***Job satisfaction***

Job satisfaction, or more appropriately teachers being unsatisfied with a job is one factor greatly impacting teacher retention and, in turn, is creating a teacher shortage. As earlier stated, Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) determined the factor most influential to the job satisfaction of teachers is related to the work environment. In addition to the environment, Skilbeck and Connell (2003) found the most common components of job satisfaction include realistic workloads, class size, curricular resources, acknowledgement of performance, salary, career pathways, and professional development opportunities. One could make the case that these factors could mostly be considered aspects of the work environment. Evans (1997) found school site-specific issues and circumstances were the predominant factors influencing teacher morale and job satisfaction. According to a report in 2000 from the Department of Education, only 11-percent of public school teachers report being satisfied with their jobs (Bobek, 2002). Heavy workloads, poor student behavior, and unsupportive leadership were cited as the most frequent negative factors affecting a teachers' commitment to remaining in the education profession (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011).

### ***Class size***

As funding for public education becomes more limited, one side effect is often larger student to teacher ratios. More students result in more work in the form of additional grading, reporting, phone calls home to parents, and generally more time and effort. Edwards and Briers (2001) found that as the size of a teacher's department increased, they indicated their likelihood to teach fewer years.

### ***Perception versus reality***

For beginning teachers, the clash between expectations and reality of their first year teaching can often result in many early career departures from education (Maistre & Pare, 2010). Maistre and Pare (2010) also point out that the immediate shift into a position of having to navigate multitudes of in the moment decision making can be overwhelming and heighten the sense of responsibility of newer teachers. Another aspect affecting the teacher shortage is the general perception of college students of the poor treatment of teachers and the perception that teaching is an under-appreciated profession possibly not worthy of consideration for a career. A recent study “found that top-performing college students viewed teaching as significantly inferior to their alternative career choice” (Behrstock-Sherratt & Rizzolo, 2014, p. 65).

### **Theoretical Framework: Person-Environment Fit Theory**

#### ***Origins***

The Person-Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit Theory) in its simplest form was first conceived in 1909 by Frank Parson (Su, Murdock, & Rounds, 2015). Parson and later William Stern in 1910 both came to their findings through processes trying to improve selection of vocational personnel. The theory gained larger prominence about a decade later from the urgent need to assess, organize, and train an enormous amount of people in an effort mobilize the United States military during World War I. After the war, P-E Fit Theory concepts were again considered to address the epidemic of mass unemployment during the great depression. Donald Paterson and the University of Minnesota teamed up to combine interviews, records, aptitude, trade, achievement, interest and personality test results to guide the unemployed to job openings that match their individual characteristics (Paterson, 1957). This general analysis of data, considered



trait-and-factor approach in vocational career placement continued into the 1960's. Lawrence Pervin began to describe performance and satisfaction as a function of individual-environment fit in 1968 while investigating the success or failure of university students (Caplan, 1987; Su, Murdock, & Rounds, 2015). Pervin (1967) considers this trait-and-factor matching style to slowly evolve into the more succinct interpretation of the Person-Environment (PE) Fit Theory.

### *Development*

Development of PE Fit Theory began to go in many directions during this era and continues to thrive in many different forms. Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments (1959), Dawis' and Lofquist's Theory of Work Adjustment (1984), Schneider's Attraction-Selection-Attraction Framework (1987), and Chatman's Person-Organization Fit (1989) are a few key theories worth noting during this era of PE Fit Theory diversification. Kristof-Brown and Billsberry (2013) go so far as to say "there are as many ways to conceptualize and measure fit as there are scholars who study it (p. 1)." Though many versions exist, it is important to note that the notion of PE Fit Theory all revert back to the person, the environment, and their interaction (Su, Murdock, & Rounds, 2015)." Varying versions of PE Fit Theory share the same following assumptions: people seek out environments that manifest their traits, the extent to which individuals fit their work environment has significant consequences, fit is an ongoing process where people shape their environment and environments shape people, and most importantly, with better fits result in better outcomes (Rounds & Tracey, 1990).

French, Rodgers, and Cobb (1974) as well as Caplan (1987) originally investigated whether individuals or environments could adjust in order to be able to be

the right fit that could operate within the pre-determined personality or environmental style. As Owens and Valesky (2015) pointed out, “It is necessary to think of the person and the organizational environment as complementary parts of one situation: they are inseparable” (p. 197).

### ***Fit***

Three assumptions underlie contemporary theories of PE Fit: Individuals seek out environments congruent with their characteristics, individuals seek to achieve correspondence with their environment, and people search for an environment that will allow them to exercise their skills and abilities, express their opinions, and assume agreeable roles (Swanson & Fouad, 1999). A widely accepted definition of Person-Environment (PE) Fit Theory is the compatibility that occurs when the individual and work environment characteristics are well matched (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011).

### ***Factors***

Numerous studies depict unanimous but slightly varying personal and environmental factors affecting the level of fit. The common factors include biological needs, psychological needs, values, goals, abilities, personality, intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, job demands, cultural values, and the character of other individuals (Blau, 1985; Blau, 1987; Caplan, 1987; Edwards, Caplan, & Van Harrison, 1998; Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006; Edwards & Cooper, 1990; Pervin, 1967; Pervin, 1968; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003).

### ***Alignment***

Gladwell (2009) discusses the many inaccuracies taken into consideration when making personnel hiring decisions. He points out that many traditional items often

factoring into the decision of who to hire are very inconsistent and not very good predictors of future success with a company. Caplan (1987) would consider these factors contributing to the subjective fit, which is based on the perception of the target individual, whereas objective fit is purely based on facts about the person and environment, free from bias. Edwards, et al. (2006) found that people gave greater weight to the environment than the individual when perceiving subjective discrepancies between the two if they arose. “Organizations wish to select persons who will best meet the demands of the job, adapt to training and changes in job demands, and remain loyal and committed to the organization” (Caplan, 1987, p. 248). Of all the duties building leaders and administrators perform, hiring new teaching staff is repeatedly said to be the most important task a public school administrator completes (Hughes, 2014).

A misfit or misalignment between the person’s characteristics and their environment will produce psychological, physiological, and behavioral outcomes, commonly referred to as “strain” (Edwards & Cooper, 1990). When the scenario exists where a person’s characteristics does not align with the environment’s characteristics, it will likely lead to negative outcomes, including dissatisfaction, poor performance, and job turnover (Swanson & Fouad, 1999).

It is plausible to increase job tenure and longevity when the factors involved in Person-Environment Fit Theory are aligned. Person-Environment Fit Theory is a theory best described as trying to match the personal factors of an employee with the environmental factors or culture of the workplace. When a good fit is in place for both the person and the environment, high performance and lengthy careers are a possibility (Pervin, 1968).

## **Person-Environment Fit Theory and Teacher Longevity**

If Pervin (1968) is correct, a good fit can result in high performance and a lengthy career. Aligning factors of an individual with an environment could have positive results for the staffing of an educational system. Learning more about the fit and its' impact on teacher longevity has great implications for education.

### ***Fit and satisfaction***

Hearn (2009) found after studying band directors in the southeast United States that the director's compatibility with their school environment is the most critically important piece determining both their career longevity and overall duration as a teacher. Further backing this concept, "As fit between an employee's personality and work environment, the employee's level of job satisfaction also increased" (Pseekos, Bullock-Yowell, & Dahlen, 2011, p. 69). Russell (2008) showed "personal teacher characteristics and professional work life best predicted...long-term career plans of string music educators" (p. 7).

### ***Artist satisfaction***

For many educators in the arts, continuing the ability to practice and perform their artistry can be very important to this professional work life. One teacher said "...working on my own art keeps my teaching from becoming stagnant...it rejuvenates me and makes me a better teacher" (Ellett, 2011, p. 9). In contrast, "The role of an artist or performer, and the role as an arts or music teacher might contradict one another as each role is attempted" (Scheib, 2006, p. 6). This type of misalignment is referred to as "role stress," which may lead to an unsatisfactory work life if not aligned.

## **Chapter II Summary**

Each individual classroom teacher is the cornerstone to student learning. Research shows more experienced teachers tend to be of higher quality. Utilizing the Person-Environment Fit Theory, school administrators have the potential to place teachers in the right building environment, thus resulting in increased likelihood of retaining experienced and quality teachers. Determining the factors that impact the accuracy of the match could be of great benefit for future candidate searches. If a hiring administrator hypothetically knows several key personal factors to be looking for in a candidate, better and more long-term decisions regarding which teacher to hire for a specific job in a specific building might be able to increase the educational potential of a specific school site.

The Person-Environment Fit Theory may offer insight into how schools might better retain teachers. Schools making an effort to match and meet the factors of Person-Environment Fit Theory could result in benefits to teacher retention methods. Retaining more and higher quality teachers has a greater chance of resulting in a raised level of student outcomes.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

“Regardless of whether one favors qualitative or quantitative research, there is a strong and essential common ground between the two” (Yin, 2002, p. 15). However, the challenge is selecting the most appropriate methodological instrument that will yield the information sought. Merriam (1998) maintains, “The key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (1998, p. 6). Additionally, she states “that reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality” (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). Because of the need to investigate multiple interpretations of the same social and professional teaching environment within a program, a qualitative case study design will be utilized for this study.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that lead to teachers remaining in the same position within a program at a suburban high school in a Midwestern state for the majority of their career despite high turnover rates in the state and within this district.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

- 1) What are teacher perceptions about why they have remained in the same position within the same program for an extended period of time?
- 2) What are teacher perceptions about why all faculty in the program have remained together for an extended period of time?
- 3) What are teacher perceptions about the factors that have the greatest influence on teacher retention?
- 4) What challenges have this group of teachers faced that have threatened teacher retention?
- 5) How have they overcome these challenges?
- 6) How do Person-Environment Fit Theory factors explain job longevity in the orchestra program?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative case study design was used for this study. “Most contemporary qualitative researchers hold that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (Stake, 1995, p. 99). Merriam (1998) elaborated to say, “Research is, after all, producing knowledge about the world – in our case, the world of educational practice” (p. 3). Based on these views, a constructivist epistemology is appropriate for this qualitative case study. Crotty (1998) defined constructivist epistemology as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Teachers interacting with each other and the educational environment they are immersed constructs reality in this case. According to Merriam (1998), as long as researchers are able to specify the

phenomenon of interest, draw its boundaries, and limit what they are going to investigate, the study can be considered and named a case.

Teacher retention within one individual orchestra program is the particular focus of this study. Merriam (1998) stressed that particularistic research is a distinctive attribute of a case study, focusing on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. She uses the term “particularistic” to specifically show that research focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. Merriam notes two additional attributes: being descriptive (yields a rich, thick phenomenon description) and heuristic (illuminates the readers’ understanding of the phenomenon). Furthermore, Merriam conceives qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). According to Merriam’s definition and her clarification of program study being a distinctive attribute of case study research, a qualitative case study was an appropriate methodology to utilize for this study. Understanding the perspective of teachers and the school orchestra environment they created is an important step to begin attempting to comprehend the phenomenon of why these teachers continue to remain in their same teaching positions in the same program for such a long duration. Investigating this phenomenon of teacher longevity in a program would not be possible analyzing only one facet or piece of data. Only by utilizing data from multiple sources including interviews, observations, and document analysis will a deeper understanding be gained.

## **Methodological Procedures**



## **Participant Selection**

The population for this study were the orchestra teachers of a large secondary orchestra program in a Midwestern state who remained in the same instructional position within the program for the entirety of their careers. One beginning teacher started the orchestra program 35 years ago. To accommodate the expanding student population due to continual, steady growth, the staff progressively grew to six additional teaching positions, but not a single teacher had left the program since it began in 1980. Interview participants were selected using purposeful sampling procedures. Merriam (1998) suggested, "Purposive or purposeful sampling usually occurs before the data are gathered" (p. 66). Participants who were purposefully selected include eight string teachers from the program who remained in the same position for the majority of their careers, three of which have retired since this study began. Eight total participants were selected in order to provide multiple perspectives.

## **Data Collection**

Merriam (1998) suggested guidance for data collection procedures: conduct effective interviews, be a careful observer, and mine data from documents. Interviews were conducted with the purposefully selected eight string teachers in the string orchestra program to provide multiple perspectives of both personal and environmental factors affecting teacher retention. During the course of the interviews, open-ended questions were asked in an effort to encourage thoughtful and in-depth responses. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed word-for-word. The interviews were transcribed soon after the interviews were completed in an effort to ensure accuracy and to enable me to

remember as many minute details as possible. While interviewing, I also noted the interviewee's nonverbal cues and other notes to assist in description of the interview setting.

Merriam (1998) made the point that data collection and analysis are often simultaneous because ongoing intake of data can lead to some alteration in the research process. Observations fit into this category. Formalized observations took place during this study in classrooms as well as any other related observational scenarios utilized for this study.

Merriam (1998) encouraged collection and analysis of data into categories and a search for patterns within the qualitative mined data. Document collection and review consisted of group emails from the teachers to the orchestra community, related orchestra websites promoting and informing the program, and other related documents. As they became available, digital items were collected to build a general concept of personal and environmental factors existing within the school setting.

Multiple sources of data were collected. Information was gathered from interviews. Additional data was collected through gathering materials and documents from a variety of district resources the orchestra program utilizes, such as websites, emails, and any other materials that become available. "Analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses, and once all the data are in" (Merriam, 1998, p. 155).

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (1998) defined data analysis as "the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting

what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (p. 178). Following collection of all data, I analyzed the information by utilizing Creswell’s (2009) six-step process for data analysis. These steps included: organize and prepare data, read data, code data, generate themes or categories, convey findings, and interpret meaning (Creswell, 2009).

Once interviews were fully transcribed, interview transcripts and all other materials including group emails were printed for visual organization and consolidation. All data was read several times, highlighting and then coding certain similar and identical phrases between participants. While coding, common themes began to emerge. Coded concepts were grouped together, attempting to consolidate large concepts into more reduced, specific identifying data themes.

After themes were identified and adequately considered, codified data was then reconsidered during a second round of analysis through the lens of the P-E Fit Theory without thought of where the data fit within the different themes. Data was highlighted and coded a second time, identifying similar concepts of the P-E Fit Theory. As the data began to consolidate into the different characteristics associated with the theory, it became apparent that a portion of the data would be difficult to fit within a single categorical characteristic, as many overlapping characteristics existed.

### **Researcher Role**

#### **Researcher Bias**

I have been a teacher and administrator in the public education system for twenty-two years and am currently the Director of Fine Arts for the district being investigated. It

is important to note this limitation because the determination to remain in the music education profession may bias my attitude toward similar individuals choosing to remain in education. This may affect the study because I have chosen to remain in education, like the subjects, for a prolonged period of time. Although I attempted to be as unbiased as possible, the perceptions and opinions of those who have left the education profession before retirement age will not be included in this study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation were all completed in an ethical manner in order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility.

#### ***Data collection ethics***

Qualitative research necessitates ethical considerations to be addressed when collecting data. Patton (2002) and Creswell (2009) noted these items related to this study to include: properly gaining access to the research site, minimizing disruptions at the research site, informed consent, confidentiality, IRB approval, and interview protocol.

Permission to access the schools within the district for this study was requested from the Associate Superintendent, as that office is the one who grants research requests. Once research approval was granted and research begins, every effort was made to limit disruptions to the school sites as much as possible by coordinating with participants to have research activities take place when it best fits participants' needs. An informed consent form was presented for participants to sign. These forms outlined exact details regarding the process utilized to garner confidentiality and anonymity. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted from the University for this Study. Interview

protocol was closely followed in order to remain neutral and not lead participants to any pre-determined conclusions.

### ***Data analysis and interpretation ethics***

Pseudonyms were used and all names of school district, school buildings, individuals, and any identifying labels were changed in an effort to maintain complete anonymity. All data collected was kept in the researcher's possession or in a secure, locked location at all times. Follow-up questions and conversational member checks were utilized in order to avoid incorrect data interpretations.

### **Trustworthiness of Findings**

In qualitative case studies, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended four criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of findings: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended numerous techniques in order to ensure the credibility of this study: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checks, purposeful sampling, and triangulation. The prolonged engagement allowed me to build trust, develop a rapport with subjects, build relationships, and obtain a wide scope of accurate data. Persistent observation helped me obtain in-depth and accurate data and to sort relevant from irrelevant information. Triangulation was achieved by gathering information from websites, interviews, documents, and observations. "A major strength of case study data collection is the

opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (Yin, 2009, pp. 114-115). The limitations of each type of data collection are minimized through the effective use of triangulation. Peer debriefing was an important step during the research process to bring forth elements possibly not yet exposed. Member checks were conducted by providing participants with a copy of their interview transcript to verify accuracy. Follow-up communication was enacted when the need arose to further clarify answers provided during interviews.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the ability of the results of one study to be applied to another in a different setting or scenario. Describing the research setting, context, participants, research design, and results in detail can allow for readers to make transferability decisions on their own due to a good understanding of the current project.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability refers to the ability of the study to be replicated and confirmability references the ability of the study’s findings to be consistent with another person’s interpretations of the findings. I was fully transparent in my approach to research to further embolden the dependability and confirmability of the study.

Table 2

*Trustworthiness Criteria and Examples*

<i>Criteria/Technique</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Examples</i>
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<b>Credibility</b> Prolonged engagement	Built trust Develop rapport Built relationships Obtained wide scope of data Obtained accurate data	Was in the field intermittently from December 2020 to February 2021; used multiple avenues of communication: emails, phone calls, text messages, and in-person virtual appointments.
Persistent observation	Obtained in-depth data Obtained accurate data Sorted relevancies from irrelevancies	Observation of teachers during classes and other district events.
Triangulation	Verified data	Numerous sources of data: interviews, websites, documents, observations
Peer debriefing	An additional perspective and guidance from a trusted source	Discussed and helped other doctoral students in the writing process of this document
Member checking	Verified documentation and conclusions	The interview participants received copies of the transcripts and final paper to verify accuracy, especially related to the conclusions drawn from the study, and to provide any important missing information and to schedule a follow-up meeting
Purposive sampling	Generated data for emergent design and emerging hypotheses	Chose educators from the program being investigated
<b>Transferability</b> Referential adequacy	Provided a comprehensive picture of the program	Collected information from district website, district documents, and multiple perspectives
Thick description	Provided a data base for transfer ability judgment Provided a vicarious experience for the reader	Experience of participants and their overall opinions about

		educational longevity as a whole
<b>Dependability/Confirmability</b> Access to an audit trail	Allowed auditor to determine trustworthiness of study	Interview questions, notes, documents, note cards, transcripts, and all relevant communication related to study are readily available

### **Limitations of Study**

One limitation of this study was the focus on one string orchestra program in one school district. Specifically, investigating one orchestra program has its own set of limitations such as only having one set of staff members, one set of geographical and environmental factors, one general school district culture, one set of district administration, and only one community overall. Further study with varied geographical locations and environmental factors is worthy of consideration for future research.

Another limitation was that I am the Director of Fine Arts within the participants' school district and currently serve as three of the teachers evaluating administrator. The researcher's role was continually down-played and subjects were reminded frequently that this study is completely independent of their employment in the school district; rather a general focus on educational trends. Furthermore, the participants were encouraged to offer complete, honest answers during the study to assist with garnering valid results. Because of this scenario, subjects were reminded of their complete anonymity and were reassured that every effort was made to obscure any direct links to the district or their position. In addition, extra effort was made to ensure questions are open-ended and not leading in any way to allow subjects to answer based on their own



thoughts, not any pre-destined, desired response that may fit within the research narrative.

### **Summary**

This chapter provides a review of the methodology that was utilized for this study. Selection of participants, data collection, data analysis strategies for this study are all covered in this chapter. Additionally, the researcher's role and possible bias are discussed due to their potential impact on the study. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness are also discussed in order to demonstrate how the research findings will attempt to be valid and reliable.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Research Site**

The research location was a suburban school district in a Midwestern state with a student population of approximately 16,000. Specific sites for this study were the four secondary education buildings in the district. These four sites house grades 6-12 and just less than 8,000 students. The school sites consist of: a 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Center; an 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Center; a Freshmen Academy for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students; and a High School for students in grades 10-12. All buildings are near each other, residing within an approximate two-mile radius. The proximity of the buildings allows for convenient informal observations and frequent walk-throughs for this study.

Like most, the district has evolved over time. The composition of sites, population, and physical locations have slightly altered throughout the district's tenure. When the orchestra program began in 1981, all string education took place in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. There were approximately a total of 6,000 students in the entire district. At that point in time, 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were housed in six elementary schools, before combining all-together into the 7<sup>th</sup> grade site.

There are now 13 elementary schools in the district. Current enrollment in the entire orchestra program consisting of students in grades 6-12 is just over 700. With nearly 10% of the secondary student population in the orchestra program, it is widely recognized as a thriving, robust, popular, and formidable program.

Orchestra still begins in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade currently but all 6<sup>th</sup> grade students are now housed all together at one site in what would be considered a middle school environment. This allows for a more unified approach to teaching beginner string students. Once joined together in 6<sup>th</sup> grade from the 13 elementary sites around the district, students stay together through graduation from 12<sup>th</sup> grade as one large grade class of students. This results in students moving sites when graduating from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grades, from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades, and then one last time from 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grades. A student progressing at a regular pace in the district will attend school in the four secondary buildings on their path to graduation: 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Grade Center, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Center, Freshmen Academy, and High School.

### **Covid-19 Protocols**

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, out of an abundance of caution, all interviews for this study took place via the Zoom video-conference program. The limitations of completing interviews from a distance were minimized since non-verbal motions and movement could still be observed through video representation of the subject.

Class observations still took place at these four secondary building sites. Observations consisted of both informal walk-throughs and longer sit-down sessions lasting the majority of the class period. Researcher observations were noted soon after

each session in order to recall the most details possible. The only noticeable differences caused by the pandemic during classroom visits consisted of mask-wearing and slightly decreased student populations in each class, since a large portion of the student body chose to participate in virtual education, eliminating their need to attend in-person classes.

An unexpected side-effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic was the near non-existence of additional documents to add to the investigation. Since numerous activities including fundraising, concerts, events, parent meetings, and field trips have not occurred this school year, none of those additional materials were available to be collected nor analyzed for this study. However, a number of group emails communicating with the orchestra community about necessary alterations due to the pandemic and other related topics were a valuable item that added to the investigation.

### **Research Participants**

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling procedures. The potential participants consisted of eight string teachers from the orchestra program. Since beginning this project, three of the string teachers eligible for retirement through the state teacher retirement system have retired. Two of the three retirees were still willing to participate in the study. Between this added post-employment perspective and those of the new members hired to fill the vacancies created by their retirements, another potential level of depth of information and perception has been provided.

*Participant Demographics*

	<u>Year Joined</u>	<u>Years in Orch Prog</u>	<u>Total Years in Education</u>
Dave (retired)	1981	35	35
Karon	1988	33	33.5
Jeanne (retired)	1988	30	30
Henry	2007	14	21
Amy	2009	12	12
Tom (retired)	2011	7	31
Owen	2018	3	3
<u>Kaylee</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>

**Dave**

The original orchestra teacher was Dave. He is a son of a music educator and grew up on the East coast, completing his Bachelor's degree before moving west to become a graduate music student, fully expecting to return back home to the east upon graduation. He met his wife before completing school and has stayed in the area ever since. Dave was hired by the district for the orchestra job immediately after he completed his Master's Degree at a local university in 1981. There were two similar opportunities at two different districts in the state and he chose this one due to what he thought provided the most opportunity at the time. This career narrative, though a common tale thread through many individual's stories is important, as it plays a role in the study with respect to its impact on longevity and why teachers may stay.

Dave started the program by recruiting students to participate in orchestra as 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in their elementary school. His first teaching assignment consisted of elementary string classes at all elementary schools, which was six at the time. The following year, he graduated with those students to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, while he started a second batch of beginners at the elementary schools. Dave continued this trend of adding a new class of beginners each year while the first class continued to progress through middle school and on into high school. Dave has since retired, but by his seventh year, Dave had grown the program to the point that it warranted additional staff.

The program's second and third teachers were hired at the same time, both into part-time positions. Karon and Jeanne came from different backgrounds, but were both hired to continue the beginning strings program in the elementary schools and as additional help for the middle school level.

### **Karon**

Karon grew up in a city on the other side of the state and had attended a university in the same area. She taught orchestra for one semester at a local school district with hopes to earn a permanent position there, only to be passed over for a former teacher in the district who was unexpectedly moving back home. After another opportunity was shockingly rescinded two weeks before the next school year was to begin, Dave reached out to Karon to invite her in for an interview. Karon spoke about this experience and noted that her visit never really felt like an interview; rather, it seemed like they were merely providing her with all the information she might want to know about the district seemingly in an effort to encourage her to accept the job offer. At the end of her visit, she

noted that the Fine Arts supervisor at the time concluded by saying that they would see her on Monday at the new teacher meetings. When Karon got back in the car, it took her a while to realize that she had just agreed to moving across the state to start a new job in a few days in a town she had only been to once in her life. Karon is currently the lead director of the entire orchestra program, helping to facilitate all facets of the program as well as help manage her string teacher colleagues.

### **Jeanne**

Jeanne completed a performance degree at a university in a nearby state before moving to the area with her husband for his employment. She spent some time focusing on being a mother before returning to complete her education certification requirements and searching for a teaching job. She became available for employment at the same time the job opportunity presented itself. Jeanne and Dave already knew each other through their music performance careers with the local professional symphony. Jeanne retired from education after 30 years.

The original three string teachers continued to develop their teaching careers as the orchestra program progressed, resulting in all three eventually transitioning to full time teachers. One interesting aspect of this trio that allowed them to become more familiar with each other was their playing opportunities with the local professional symphony as well as many free-lance gigs during this era. String teachers from neighboring programs often referred to the three as “the happy ship.” Enrollment slowly trended up over the course of the next 19 years before hiring their fourth team member in 2007: Henry.

## **Henry**

Henry had taught in two different neighboring districts before accepting the job to join the happy ship. He knew the three existing staff members extensively through their performance jobs with the local professional symphony. Henry currently is the lead orchestra teacher at the Freshmen Academy, as well as teaching both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade courses in a team-teaching set up.

## **Amy**

Amy joined the team in 2009 after student teaching with the program staff the previous semester. She went to the same local university that most of the staff had previously attended. The ability for her to work on the team in a student-teaching capacity before joining as a permanent full time teacher provided a great opportunity for all to get to know each other very well. She knew what the standards for the program were, what to expect on day one of her tenure, and precisely what it meant to be on the orchestra team. She also said that she loved being able to give Jeanne and Karon a hard time because she happened to be born the year they started teaching in the district. Amy is currently the lead 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and also assists both at the high school and with 7<sup>th</sup> grade courses in a team-teaching scenario.

## **Tom**

Tom was added to the staff when student enrollment sky-rocketed to record heights in the year 2011. He had taught other music classes in the district but had no prior string experience before joining the team. Several of his fellow teachers commented that Tom's open willingness to learn their approach to string technique allowed for a really



special situation to take place. They all appreciated Tom's contributions to the program before he had to leave suddenly due to health concerns. Upon his departure, a long term substitute position was procured to take on the students from his roster and the program was fortunate to have a very familiar candidate already on site.

### **Owen**

Owen also had the benefit of student teaching with the orchestra program in the fall semester of 2017, becoming very comfortable and familiar with the inner works of the program and the staff. Due to Tom's early departure, Owen was hired as a long-term substitute once his student teaching assignment was completed. Again, this situation provided an invaluable opportunity for Owen to become fully immersed in the program. This allowed for a very smooth transition into a full time employment position the following school year in 2018. On top of the immediate experience Owen garnered during his student teaching, he also knew a lot about the program since he attended school in this district and was an active student participant in the string program. After his graduation, at the urging of the orchestra staff he attended a nearby university before returning to work on his student teaching. This is an unusual path since student teachers are usually discouraged from returning to their alma mater for their student teaching experience, but Owen had worked with several neighboring school district string programs in his first few years of college so the university felt like he had already been exposed to a variety of educational environments. Owen is currently the lead 6<sup>th</sup> grade lead orchestra teacher and also team-teaches 7<sup>th</sup> grade courses.

### **Kaylee**

Kaylee was hired to fill the vacancy caused by Jeanne's retirement. Kaylee attended college in a nearby state in a major city. While attending the university, she also taught strings at a charter school in the area. She noted that actively teaching while going to school to learn how to become a teacher provided a great opportunity to hone her craft of education and she was very thankful for the non-traditional arrangement. Upon graduation, she got a job at a suburban school district in the same metro-plex teaching both strings and class guitar at a middle school. While at the middle school, she felt responsible for recruiting large classes of students but ran into challenges created by the low socioeconomic status that specific school possessed compared with every other building in the district. She continued in this position for 5 years before moving with her husband to the area the study took place. Her first job in this area was at a neighboring school district teaching middle school strings. Kaylee completed one year in that position before accepting the job to replace Jeanne in 2018. Kaylee is currently the lead 7<sup>th</sup> grade orchestra teacher and also assists with team-teaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade courses.

### **Themes from the Data**

During interviews, it was enlightening to hear numerous consistent themes shared by each participant, confirming that there were a number of commonly shared perceptions from different individuals on the staff. Whether retired, fully tenured, or one of the newer members of the staff, a number of these themes wove through each individual's interview, reflecting some unifying perceptions. The themes include: respect, team-teaching, flexibility, freedom, support, and performing.

#### **Respect**

One perception all participants touched on was the mutual respect they all feel for each other. Dave thought that he “felt like there was an atmosphere that was collectively created by everyone that led to a great working environment and we just really got along professionally.” He shared that he felt like the respect the staff showed each other helped make them all want to continue working together. Karon stated that in the beginning, “even though we were three different personalities, we just really respected each other.”

Amy had a unique perspective joining the team well into the program’s third decade. She thought that the original trio set up such a great example of positive personal interactions and that it was a result of the three of them essentially traversing through phases of life together. Amy definitely thought that though the team got along professionally very well, the healthy acquiescence of their personal life was likely what actually made the team work together at such a high level. Everyone shared some version of her statement, “we have a really good team dynamic where we all care about each other and I think that makes it enjoyable to come to work like you’re a part of something special.”

Owen has a thorough perspective on the orchestra staff since he saw it as a student, a student teacher, and as a teacher. He said “I mean, to see Karon as my 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and then work with her, it’s just a healthy environment.” Owen also mentioned that a true sign of respect has been displayed by the more experienced teachers being open-minded and not just listening, but considering his new ideas. Kaylee shows her respect to her tenured colleagues by noting, “The system has worked and I don’t see why I shouldn’t trust them. I think they’re great and I really like them so I think that helps a lot.”

## **Team-Teaching**

Karon bluntly stated that “she laughs when they are in professional development and are required to attend a session on team teaching.” She finds this humorous because the individuals usually who are presenting have not nearly the amount of experience in team teaching as the orchestra staff. She noted, “If we had more time, WE should be the ones presenting!”

Three teachers noted they reap the positive benefit of observing each other setting up the expectations of their learning environment. Not only did the teachers say they learn through this process, but it also allows for improved student discipline throughout their program. Receiving all sorts of different viewpoints helps them strengthen their individual ideas and methods of instruction was mentioned by two teachers. Karon shared that in the early days, “If a student was acting up, Jeanne and I would always do this ‘good cop versus bad cop’ routine and it just worked like a well-oiled machine.”

At some point in their careers, four teachers mentioned having struggles with either an individual student or teaching a specific concept. These teachers followed up the admission of struggling with a statement about how one or more of their colleagues jumped in to assist them either by actively helping at the moment it occurred, or by engaging in a private discussion sharing advice after the fact in private. Henry said, “We can freely share with someone else if they need assistance, and can also openly ask if others have suggestions.” Jeanne made the observation that she thought this is a benefit most teachers in other curricular areas do not necessarily experience since they rarely are in each other’s room during class time.

Two of the newer staff members mentioned they felt comfortable to run their plans by the more tenured teachers and gained some great guidance from those who have much more experience. Henry stated, “Not everybody has the same strengths. I learned so much. I found there is so much to be gained by collaborating with the other teachers.”

Combining and dividing classes was cited as a strength of their team-teaching strategy by four teachers. Combining smaller classes together, or sometimes combining classes of different instruments provides the opportunity for additional music education methods to be explored. Likewise, splitting a larger class up into smaller groups allows for more specified instruction to take place. Jeanne shared that “Team teaching helped SO much” and that, “dividing the duties up so that it would allow somebody to work with a student one on one was just great.” Karon mentioned the ability to assist each other in larger classes with the instrument tuning process was a major benefit of structuring their program based on a team-teaching concept.

Since Kaylee is also fluent in Spanish, three staff members mentioned that she is an invaluable resource to the team “that helps us bridge so much community-wise and reach out to families” that we wouldn’t easily or effectively be able to otherwise. Karon noted that because of team-teaching, a discipline problem could be “Immediately nipped in the bud because you have the opportunity to get a student on the phone with their parent to have a conversation to address what just happened.”

It was mentioned by a teacher that “I think we have a long standing team of people, who want things done a certain way so they sometimes do it themselves.” This was brought up as a bit of a short-coming that they were working on as a group and they

noted that isolating oneself on an island is the opposite of what their team-teaching strategy is centered around. Three teachers said, “If you have problem, we would just address it and take care of it.”

## **Flexibility**

Five teachers mentioned the idea that flexibility was a positive attribute of working with the orchestra staff. Flexibility showed itself in several ways: ability to leave the classroom to deal with another emergent situation or the opportunity to miss a day of school when a sick child needed their parent, flexibility of staff members interacting with each other, and the ability to stay the course or explore a new way of doing things. Two shared that teachers in other curricular areas often did not experience the same flexibility the orchestra team provided for its own members and that in hindsight, they thought this could have been a major element impacting the ability and desire to remain on the orchestra staff for such a long duration.

Four teachers noted that their colleagues in other districts often did not know what would happen if they had to miss school or step out of the classroom for an emergency. These four all agreed that knowing one of their teammates would step in to cover for them while they were out ultimately created a huge amount of flexibility in their lives. Henry shared, “He was confident his students would still progress while he was absent, which is not the usual music teacher experience in neighboring districts.”

Four teachers stated that flexibility with each other was a key element of their successful relationship. They noted that being open-minded and flexible with each other created a healthy daily working environment.

From a curricular perspective, all teachers noted in their own way that as new teachers joined the staff there was a good balance and flexibility to move back and forth between two sentiments of “we’ve always done it this way; it’s not broke, don’t fix it,” and “I know a much more efficient new way of doing things.” Comparing the tried and true ways that have shown they work with the new ideas staff are desiring to give a try. They noted the established standard versus the idea of building and improving upon the standard already set struggle is not new to any team dynamic. However, they agreed that how the two worlds and ideas are merged together say a lot about how successful a team can be. “Every time someone comes and someone leaves, they just bring a new dynamic with them” Karon said about this give and take with respect to the evolution of the staff over time. She also shared that during recent Professional Development days that she has completed some team-building exercises with the team with the hope of opening everyone’s eyes to different approaches.

Kaylee discussed this push and pull by stating, “It’s been a little tricky to try and calibrate her methods with the team, but sometimes it’s as simple as figuring out the appropriate ability level and pace of instruction.” Dave stated, “even if we had little differences of strategies and techniques, we were all real good about just discussing things and working together.” Four of the orchestra staff mentioned that though there may have been difficult discussions at times, all understood and agreed that certain growing pains are worth going through to make the team and program stronger. Dave wrapped up his thoughts by commenting, “all of us helped to make decision and it was really very diplomatically done.”

## **Freedom**

In contrast to flexibility being a positive factor, three teachers discussed their freedom in orchestra instructional techniques as a short-coming that had to be addressed several times in the past. One teacher commented “we realized we really were kind of being worked against in different ways and we were too inconsistent by being flexible.” They explained this lack of consistency between classrooms resulted in realignment to give each teacher a certain area to focus on as the lead teacher. These three teachers came to the conclusion that sometimes having less freedom can be a good thing. One mentioned the analogy of “only having to plan for and ultimately be responsible for their piece of the pie, not the entire dessert.” They thought this definition of the leader role versus assistant role helped clarify educational strategies in the program and created a stronger structure with more consistency throughout the grade levels of the program.

Having to think primarily about their “piece of the pie” helped several of the teachers gain a foothold in the program and some noted it allowed them to avoid being overwhelmed by what could seem like simply too many students, too many classrooms, too many buildings, and just too many of everything. Kaylee stated, “I only have 7<sup>th</sup> grade, or I only have 6<sup>th</sup> grade at their own time so it made it a lot easier to focus.” One teacher joked about the fact that it was good they shared the responsibilities of leadership for the various grade levels because sometimes when Dave would come over to help at the middle school grades, his mind was still focused on the high school program.

The freedom to avoid being assigned to only one grade level forever was appreciated by all teachers. Karon noted that being able to see the kids in all the different grades is a huge benefit for the program. Five stated that involvement at grade levels other than their primary focus where they were the lead teachers allowed them to garner a



deeper grasp of how their piece of the pie fit within the entire whole. What they did at one grade level greatly impacted what takes place at the next grade level, and so on. This is commonly referred to as Vertical Alignment. Kaylee mentioned, “It helped just seeing the long-term goals for us in 7<sup>th</sup> grade being able to teach 6<sup>th</sup> grade because then I can actually prepare them for 8<sup>th</sup> grade.” Grasping the desired ascent up the ladder of abilities allowed the teachers to know the appropriate speed of learning and comprehension to aim for. Once a staff member reaches this understanding, two teachers mentioned a sense of ownership that lets them know they really matter and that if you want students to be successful, you must have your act together with the students in front of you when it’s your piece of the pie.

Amy noted that this phenomenon of focusing on your certain grade level, while also engaging students from other grades was an upgrade compared with our neighboring school districts. Henry shared that he thought this was a potential reason other teachers moved from job to job: seeking to teach their preferred grade level. The structures of other school districts are established for each instructor to merely focus on their one grade or area, without the opportunity to both team teach or gain an understanding of where your piece of the pie fits in the overall program. Three teachers noted that the structures of the other districts led to a feeling of “being on an island,” and that the freedom to be involved in multiple grade levels also with other teachers eliminated this feeling of isolation.

Dave stated, “I really appreciated the autonomy we were always given.” He went on to elaborate that the feeling of freedom to run the program as he saw fit never changed over the years from administrator to administrator. He felt like no one was ever looking

over his shoulder in a negative way. Four teachers also mentioned this perception of being left alone to simply do their job and this will also be discussed as an element of support.

Kaylee described the feeling of freedom she had in other school districts she had worked for, talking about her ability to make her own choices and decisions, and to present an educational lesson in her own way. At the same time, she noted this freedom was not always a good thing because she was having to make all of these decisions on her own with virtually no one available to bounce her ideas and questions off of. It took Henry a while to adjust to not being solely responsible for all students and that every student in the program was now theirs, not exclusively hers. Kaylee had the opinion that what perception of freedom she had elsewhere was very willingly given up in order to work on a team and reap all the benefits thereof.

## **Support**

Support, or lack thereof, is commonly mentioned as a factor that leads to teachers leaving the profession. All participants in this study stated that the support they received was a factor that led to them remaining in this same position for the length they have. Several interpretations of support were discussed and the way it manifested itself varied.

Some viewed support purely from an administrative support perspective, noting that principals always loved the orchestra program and would do whatever was needed when asked by the orchestra teachers. Dave noted that different principals were supportive in different ways. Some were more passive and others were actively supportive. He recalled a story back in the 1980's where a high school principal found an

extra \$1,000 from another account in the building to assist the orchestra students buying plane tickets back to the East Coast for an event they were invited to participate in.

Kaylee said, “I feel like there were a lot of administrative items I had to deal with at my other jobs that I just don’t have to here, which is nice.”

Several teachers noted that in general, the administrators and everyone who is responsible to make sure they are doing their job were very kind and extremely capable. Kaylee noted, “I feel like I’m trusted, which is amazing because I should be trusted. You trust me with a job and I’m going to do it.”

Additionally, all mentioned that they felt fully supported by the entire district and all of its components. From the building principals, district administrators, building engineers, custodians, district support staff, accounting department, bus drivers, lunch ladies, fellow non-orchestra teachers, and even board of education, teachers noted how they consistently felt supported from top to bottom while in the district. Five specifically stated that they felt “valued” by the district and community. They noted that feeling valued gave them the confidence and pride in the school and since they could make a difference, it made it easy to come to work. Three noted that the district just had a feeling of being an Arts-friendly school community.

All mentioned that they always were given the materials needed to properly function in the string education environment. Two did note that they were careful to not ask for too much, but felt that led to administrators acting on their requests when submitted because there was a level of trust that the orchestra staff was not always asking for the moon. Kaylee also noted that the quality of equipment and supplies were on the

higher end and were more than adequate. Dave shared his thoughts on equipment; “I always tried to focus on what we did have instead of what we didn’t and we should try to do the best we can with that.” Jeanne stated that “The facilities were second to none and visitors from other districts were in awe of what we had.”

Six teachers discussed the level of support they received from each other. Owen said, “We all kind of have each other’s backs and are in it for the kids.....this shows the willingness of everyone to pitch in and work together.” Four noted there was no question whether the rest of the staff would step in to help if any of their colleagues were in need.

Another area where teachers received support from each other was during the indoctrination of new members of the staff. Three said, “I think it’s assumed that we’re hiring people that just know what to do.....but we can do a better job of welcoming them.” Informal summer get-togethers would include discussion about the upcoming school year, concert planning, teacher schedules and responsibilities, and general approaches to teaching. Kaylee discussed that there is an understanding that teachers to a new school district, building, or orchestra team would not know certain protocols, operations, or even simple basic concepts of where things are or who to ask for what. Three more experienced staff mentioned that they all have tried to help the newcomers in their own ways with mixed results. Both new and experienced teachers noted that this was a positive because at the very least, new teachers knew they had an ally they could approach and ask questions.

Though the teachers feel supported by the parents of student participants in their program, three noted that parental support is one of the elements of support they feel is

under-utilized. All teachers note that the students' parents have always been available and willing when asked for help on a specific task or project. However, they feel like it has been several years since true strong parental support existed. Kaylee mentioned that it seemed awkward that even after concerts parents never really wanted to talk in the lobby afterwards. She thought involving parents a bit more could ultimately help the program a lot.

Four teachers made the effort to note that they are advocating for increased parental involvement, but did not provide details of how they imagined this would occur. These four mentioned they felt like increasing parental support was an opportunity for growth in the orchestra program and one which could have extremely positive outcomes but one stated, "Parental support is just not like it used to be."

### **Performing**

The original trio said they got to know each other so well at least in part because of all of the professional playing they did together. Getting their own personal fulfillment through their own playing careers is a common theme from six teachers. These six play in both local professional orchestras, numerous gigs for special events, and three even get their musical enrichment through conducting community orchestras and youth orchestras in the area. Amy said that, "the music scene here has been really helpful for those of us who want to still have playing careers." Karon thinks that playing together professionally makes the team a stronger team of teachers.

Two staff members pointed out that "some of our staff is so overrun with their own performance schedules that it can be hard for them to find a way to expand their

involvement with the program and community outside of the school day.” They elaborated that playing in two professional symphonies can often result in only one free week per month, which often means very limited desire to vigorously push for program improvement in their spare time. Though continuing to hone their personal artistic craft has many upsides, there is the perception by two staff that the program sometimes can be relegated to second place and may not make as much progress as if their colleagues had more available time and effort.

### **Research Questions**

**What are teacher perceptions about why they have remained in the same position within the same program for an extended period of time?**

Teachers had a number of perceptions about why they have remained in their position for a long period of time. The ability to work with multiple grade levels and a certain level of educational autonomy to do what they felt was the right thing for their students were two specific examples explaining this long-term retention. Also, teachers felt a sense of professional exposure, assistance, and growth that was created by their participation in a team-teaching structured program. Their perception of working in what they considered a pro-Arts, extremely supportive school district was also noted as having a positive impact as well. Most importantly, the feeling of support from their colleagues many noted was a major factor in their decision to remain in the same position for the duration of their career. This support manifested itself by allowing the program to rarely utilize a substitute teacher since the other orchestra team members would alter their schedules to cover the classes of the absent teacher. The team commented that knowing their students would not be left with an unknown substitute, but instead they would

receive a high-quality class of instruction from one of their colleagues was noted as a deeply valuable support mechanism that made teachers comfortable whenever they were forced to be absent. This is abnormal since most teachers have no idea who will be covering their class while they are gone. In instrumental music classes, this is even more of a stress reliever for the team members since orchestra teachers and especially substitute orchestra teachers are fairly rare. With so much equipment and unique lessons to be taught, knowing your classes are in good hands while you are gone was mentioned numerous times as an extremely positive factor impacting teacher retention in the orchestra program.

**What are teacher perceptions about why all faculty in the program have remained together for an extended period of time?**

Perceptions about why all the faculty have remained together as a team of orchestra teachers prompted very similar responses. The courtesy and respect their colleagues show each other daily was a primary reason teachers thought the team stayed together for so long. Being able to adapt to each other in order to work together in a positive manner as well as the ability to miss a class or day of work while their students would still receive a quality education from their colleagues were two perceptions promoting the team to stay together that was mentioned by staff members. Additionally, staff members performing together professionally arose as a perceived factor leading to team unity over time.

Ultimately, teams of individuals have to choose to get along. The orchestra team members made several comments about knowing how important it was for them all to get

along. They purposefully made the choice to put up with the foibles of each individual because in the end, their team was stronger for it. This acceptance of each other as unique individuals and support for each other spoke strongly about why this team remained together for an extended period of time.

**What are teacher perceptions about the factors that have the greatest influence on teacher retention?**

Perceived appreciation from the school district of the orchestra staff was one factor noted by multiple teachers. Two even commented, “Gosh, if you are not supported or appreciated, why would you even want to stay at a job like that?” Additionally, most teachers mentioned support from various sources as an important factor during interviews which included: administrator support, general overall school district support, colleague support, parental support, and financial and material support.

The orchestra teachers realized and appreciated the fact that they are on a team and are not working alone without support. They mentioned that teachers in other curricular areas are not all as fortunate as they were to have such a team-concept surrounding them and thought this was likely a major factor influencing teacher retention.

**What challenges have this group of teachers faced that have threatened teacher retention?**

The most prominent challenge addressed by the teachers was the exponential growth in student participants the program underwent. The growing pains of adding additional staff members because of this growth and the indoctrination of new teachers onto the orchestra team were also mentioned as challenges.



### **How have they overcome these challenges?**

Teachers kept circling back to support for each other and adaptability as two methods that allowed the staff to overcome any challenges they encountered. Teachers noted that knowing everyone had each other's backs when challenges were encountered aided the team as they traversed difficulties. Adaptability was demonstrated by staff members as they took some established methods already in place in the program and mixed them with fresh ideas the new teachers brought to the program. Teachers noted a healthy mix between new and old helped propel the team forward.

An informal vetting of future potential orchestra program team members was also a valuable tool several teachers mentioned. A number of the newer hires had all student taught or completed some type of internship arrangement with the orchestra program before joining the team as a full time team member. This get to know you period was extremely useful for both the incoming candidate as well as the existing team members. For the new incoming staff member, it allowed them to garner a clear understanding of the standards the orchestra team holds and also generally sets the tone for how they operate. For the existing team members welcoming the new hire onto the staff, it allows them time to adjust to the new team member intricacies, as well as learning their strengths and weaknesses so they can more appropriately place the new hire and assign them the most appropriate duties and tasks. This get to know you period turned out to be very meaningful and purposeful for both new and old, and helped allow for smooth transitions as staff members retired and joined the team.

## **How do Person-Environment Fit Theory factors explain job longevity in the orchestra program?**

The personal factors of biological needs, psychological needs, values, goals, abilities, and personality were addressed in the participant interviews as were the environmental factors of intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, job demands, cultural values, and character of other individuals. Much of the data was interrelated and had such a strong relationship with regard to the P-E Fit Theory that it was often difficult to decide which factor the specific item most closely addressed. This finding aligns with Owens and Valesky (2015), which pointed out that the complementary parts of the person and the organizational environment are inseparable. The compatibility of the individual and the environmental characteristics of the P-E Fit Theory that was demonstrated in the interviews provided a strong explanation for the orchestra teams' longevity. The fit of the individuals and the environment really matters. Some of this fit is achieved by purposeful, intentional work by the team members, while some of the fit is met unknowingly by the orchestra staff simply because they have the characteristics that naturally and organically mesh so well.

### **Summary**

Themes that emerged while gathering data include respect, team-teaching, flexibility, freedom, support, and performing. Much deeper analysis and interpretation of the data and themes is covered in the next chapter. A thorough investigation of the data through the lens of the P-E Fit Theory will allow for the opportunity of a deeper look at what factors may impact teacher retention.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Now that the themes of respect, team-teaching, freedom, flexibility, support, and performing that emerged while gathering data have been discussed, interpretation of the data will occur in this chapter. One item that immediately began to stand out during the interview process was the large number of similar responses from all participants. This team clearly has some unified thoughts about how their program runs and at times it was uncanny just how identical a portion of their statements were.

The emergent themes and characteristics of the P-E Fit Theory support several major takeaways from the study: the functioning relationships and alignment of team fit really matter; alleviating the feeling of isolation by being fully supported by teammates is important; team-teaching encourages and allows for continued professional growth and curricular alignment in the department; and the informal vetting of candidates as future potential colleagues has served as an invaluable tool to make sure the right people are being selected to join the team.

Additional takeaways from the study include: administrative support and allowing autonomy for teachers to fulfill their duties is an important and influencing factor; the

ability for individual teachers to be willing to accept differences among team members is important in maintaining team unity; and ultimately teachers deciding to respect their colleagues and support their teammates can result in a highly positive impact on teacher retention.

### **Interpretations of the Findings through the P-E Fit Theory Lens**

As noted earlier, looking at the data through the lens of the Person-Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit Theory) will allow for the opportunity of a deeper understanding of the factors impacting teaching retention. P-E Fit Theory explains the compatibility that occurs when the individual and work environment characteristics are well-matched (Dawis, 1992; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). The compatibility can also be described as “fit,” whether strong alignment exists, allowing for a good fit; or there is weak alignment, resulting in a fit that is considered weak.

Table 4

*Personal and Environmental Factors of The Person-Environment Fit Theory*

Personal Factors	Environmental Factors
Biological Needs	Intrinsic Rewards
Psychological Needs	Extrinsic Rewards
Values	Job Demands
Goals	Cultural Values
Abilities	Character of other Individuals
<b>Personality</b>	

*Note.* Adapted from Kristof-Brown, A. & Guay, R. P. (2011). Maintaining, expanding, and contracting the organization. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA Handbooks in Psychology* (pp. 3-50). Washington, DC: American Psychology Association.

After presenting the data in Chapter IV, it became apparent that many of the factors discussed allow for and lead toward a good fit with strong alignment of personal and environmental characteristics. On a similar note, Jeanne came close to this concept on her own recognition stating, “Everything just kind of fit together like a puzzle. If one piece is off, it just wasn’t going to fit, but we just had magic how our puzzle was a complete match for all these years.” A deeper investigation of each personal and environmental factor follows.

**Personal Factors: Biological Needs**

Feeling cared for and valued is something many who leave positions mention as something that did not exist. In the orchestra staff, every study participant mentioned in one way or the other both of these emotions as a cornerstone to the program and a reason

why they stayed in their position so long. Providing basic biological needs and the feeling of safety that comes with them was virtually non-existent in the interviews. This can be interpreted that it is almost a foregone conclusion that each individual's well-being is an unspoken primary expectation of the orchestra team. Four teachers did discuss the ingrained safety-net that existed on the team when any individual had to be absent to address any challenges that arose in their personal life.

A challenge for any teacher is caring for their own child while maintaining their educational career. Sick days for children of teachers can often create real anxiety and problems. However, several teachers noted that having a supportive team that all "know what's going on in the orchestra class is a huge benefit for teachers." Feeling like they had a support system ingrained in the structure of the program if they had to miss a day because their child was sick allowed teachers to enjoy their job more and not worry about things they could not control.

Money inherently provides numerous elements of biological needs. Playing professionally results in increased earned income for the orchestra teachers. Amy said that, ".....(professional playing opportunities) are things that keep us staying in town because if we moved elsewhere, those jobs are not readily available." Maintaining a healthy income with professional gigs might not be as likely elsewhere, thus possibly increasing the likelihood of staff members to remain in the local area.

The safety net created by the tight personal and professional relationships amongst the team serves as a fitting example of the orchestra staff meeting the biological

needs of the individuals. As Jeanne put it, “the fact that I knew I could rely on my colleagues, go vent to them, ask for advice, whatever, to me was the biggest factor.”

### **Personal Factors: Psychological Needs**

Friendship and an overall tone of family and attachment to the program was set for the staff at an early stage in their development. Numerous retirees, experienced teachers, as well as new members of the staff commented about the standard and expectation of high level of positive inter-personal interactions. One noted that “Dave set up kind of a mantra that we are good people above anything else.”

Amy thought that the original trio became attached as fast friends because they “balanced each other out incredibly well.” She noted that she thought this was also because the trio were traversing through similar life stages early in their careers at a somewhat simultaneous rate. Amy thought this allowed them to feel a form of kinship and support from each since they were facing some of the same challenges as their colleagues.

Freedom was mentioned numerous times as an important theme during interviews. This factor allows individuals to have the perception of control, potentially fulfilling a psychological need. Flexibility also reinforced this need by allowing for increased pleasure and a general overall good feeling among the team members. In fact, three teachers shared that they were often referred to as “The Happy Ship” by their colleagues from other schools.

The way new team members were assimilated onto the staff also provides a good example of matching the psychological need of orientation. Jeanne stated, “We had good

relationships with most of our new staff members before they joined our team, so they had very few challenges melding into our philosophy and the general way we do things. Everyone was aware we all just got along.”

### **Personal Factors: Values**

The standard that Dave set of being good people first and foremost likely has the most far-reaching and lasting impact upon the overall tone the program possesses. After interviews were complete, there is a distinct perception that all staff members continue to embody this effort to be good people to this day.

All teachers stated in some form that they were in education and continued in the profession purely because they wanted to provide a positive experience for their students. They all have a love of working with students. Five noted that they desperately want the students to enjoy what they are doing.

Kaylee says that, “I really do think this is a great program: it’s a dream for a program to have over 700 students.” Maximizing the number of students engaged in the orchestra program is a value that not all educators necessarily share nor strive for.

### **Personal Factors: Goals**

“Feeling like we can make progress toward program goals is really important.” Multiple staff members made this statement and feel “hopeful for what’s to come and feeling like we’re accomplishing things I think is helpful.” Some felt that basing the core components of the program off of their common goals and all having input and ownership eliminated a lot of potential problems that other districts can have.



A number of teachers stated that involving the maximum number of students in the orchestra program was one of their primary goals. This comes with the side-effect of diluting the student to teacher ratio, but ultimately the staff believes reaching as many kids as they can is one of their primary goals.

Goals were discussed and debated for the different grade levels at the informal summer gatherings that happened from time to time. Defining what the goals for progression from grade to grade allowed the teachers to grasp what they were trying to get students to obtain before sending them on to the next grade level.

### **Personal Factors: Abilities**

Teachers new to the team can bring with them a wide range of strengths and weaknesses in their educational craft. Although several teachers noted there is a certain unwritten rule that you are expected to be a fully functioning and competent educator when hired, there is undoubtedly the expectation from the group that you can carry your own and are prepared to step in and do the job. This is a major element of ensuring your fit onto the team. With such a small group of educators, a teacher who is not pulling their weight would have nowhere to hide, especially considering the quantity of team-teaching that occurs. Since most new members of the team were present and participating with the program prior to their being hired, their teaching abilities were already well-known before ever officially joining the team. It appears that this informal audition, get-to-know you period was vital to ensuring a good fit between the new staff member and the existing team.

### **Personal Factors: Personality**

One staff member shared, “having a boss you like counts for a lot.” At the end of the day, most people simply want to get along with the others they are around. This seemingly appeared to be a constant in the different participant statements about how they all got along with each other because their personalities aligned and never got out of sorts with each other.

A few thought that the personalities of their team were fairly normal compared to those of a number of their colleagues at neighboring districts. Exposure to some of these unique characters in the string education community gave a few a greater appreciation for working with fairly well-balanced, normal, and caring individuals.

### **Environmental Factors: Intrinsic Rewards**

A teacher said “the original staff invested their lives into this program and growing it because for so long, it was just those three and they’d get the job done.” Dave expressed a sense of achievement and pride by stating, “The atmosphere that we collectively created was just an enjoyable work environment.”

Dave had some very prophetic words when he shared, “Teachers stay in their jobs when they know they are appreciated.” All staff stated that they felt appreciated by the district, administrators, students and parents, and their colleagues.

The staff exemplifies the pride and sense of achievement they have in the orchestra program in most of their statements and actions. Whether new, experienced, or retired, all the teachers went out of their way to expressly articulate some form this sentiment.

### **Environmental Factors: Extrinsic Rewards**

Engaging hundreds of students in the orchestra program is an enviable goal that can reap many rewards for the individual teachers. “Trying to reach as many kids as we can,” Kaylee feels like results in optimal outcomes for the program. Some thought that increased population of students participating in the program improved the overall working condition, allowing a certain phenomenon of strength in numbers, gaining momentum for student success.

Though trophies can be a desirable factor for many programs, they never were much of a focus or measure of success for the orchestra team, even though they’ve won their fair share over the history of the program. Dave said, “I think that the search for getting a one rating at contest can obscure the main purpose of why we’re doing this for the kids.” Rather than trophies, the pursuit of enjoyment and satisfaction through music was a more appropriate designation the staff aspired to.

### **Environmental Factors: Job Demands**

Education can be a very challenging profession. Undoubtedly, the support of each other minimized the feeling of their job being overly demanding on a regular basis. Additionally, the unofficial vetting process most new teachers went through before joining the team allowed them to know the expectations beforehand, thus eliminating the chance of a mismatched expectation and reality.

Though classes were small at the beginning, a definite demand of their jobs in later years was the growing population of students in the orchestra program. Initially, there were even struggles to figure out where to put all these new students and how to

teach them all. Kaylee states “it is every orchestra teachers dream to have hundreds of students.” Until you have them in front of you, having to deal with the challenges that come with them, it is difficult to grasp the high level of demand on individual teachers.

### **Environmental Factors: Cultural Values**

Dave’s mantra of “being good people above anything else” is an appropriate description of one of the unwritten cultural norms of the organization. Owen said “when you see somebody put their life, time, care, and love to make a program, you want to invest in something like that.” This perception of treating people well and always trying to do the right thing for the student was pervasive over the course of the interviews.

Another aspect teachers made note of impacting the cultural values of the program is the phenomenon that all students participating in the program are there by their own choice. There is no requirement for students to participate in orchestra like there is for most of the other courses a student takes. Students are involved in the orchestra program purely because they want to be. Owen said “we get to hone their passion and see them grow in an area they really want to.” The teachers saw it as their duty to help students have the greatest time in orchestra class and believed that if they did that, then it’s going to help them love music and love to play. They noted this desire for students to enjoy music motivated their daily approach to planning for class.

On this same theme of student involvement, inclusivity was also an item that two teachers spoke about. Since they were there providing as rich of an experience as possible for the students that were choosing to be in orchestra, they felt that making the

opportunity available to anyone who was even slightly interested was a true statement about the culture of the program.

### **Environmental Factors: Character of Other Individuals**

The character of the other individuals in the program has been shown through many examples to this point. The original trio of teachers committing their lives to the program says a lot of their individual character and the general tone of the character of individuals in the program. Dave was repeatedly referred to as, “Being so easy going and just so easy to work with.” Undoubtedly, Dave’s easy-going attitude set the tone for the orchestra teachers. The staff referred to key character components of their co-workers to include being flexible, being a team player, caring about kids, being a confident musician, and being able to be sensitive to the other members of the team in order to incorporate themselves and their ideas into the mix of the team with the least amount of friction.

## **Study Implications**

### **Significance of the Study for Practitioners**

Though many themes arose during research, implications of the study for teachers are likely focused on the respect and flexibility the staff gave each other. Contributing to a good work atmosphere by respecting and supporting their colleagues in various ways appeared to result in an overall positive environment staff members appreciated being a part of. It appears that the individuals made a conscious choice to respect the differences that existed between each other. The staff members showed a level of flexibility and

respect for each other by understanding the importance of getting along with the rest of the staff.

The informal vetting of potential new candidates during student teaching internships is a good model to aspire to when possible. Allowing current staff to share expectations and get to know the characteristics of the new candidates seemed to result in smooth transitions as teachers retired and were hired onto the team.

Teachers new to a staff or team of teachers can take away from this study the importance of being flexible with their new team members. Understanding that the team is already established and you are the new piece being added to the puzzle is an important concept to consider when joining a new team. Give and take can be both ways, but having the expectation of trying to fit into the team as you join it could result in a smooth transition for new teachers.

For administrators including Fine Arts coordinators, much can be deduced from the study to potentially assist in teacher retention efforts. Autonomy arose as a major factor impacting the teacher's satisfaction in their position. However, support from administrators shown in a wide variety of ways seemed to have a large positive impact on the teachers and should be strongly considered as administrators attempt to retain their teaching staff. Additionally, being used as a valuable tool to help teachers continue to grow educationally and assisting in the curricular and vertical alignment of the program demonstrates the potential benefits of team-teaching and makes it worthy of consideration when setting teacher schedules.

### **Significance of the Study for Researchers**

This study provided understandings of factors impacting orchestra teachers' decisions to remain in one program for the duration of their career. Findings from this study emphasize the importance of matching the person and environment to achieve a good fit. Additionally, numerous items enhancing the fit were discussed, especially regarding the transition of retired teachers and the assimilation of new teachers onto the staff.

Findings from this study also demonstrate the usefulness of investigating teams of individuals who have successfully worked together for the majority of their careers. Many resources are spent searching for quality replacements and filling vacancies after employees depart their job. Gaining a better understanding of the factors that impact the decisions for individuals to stay in a job or leave it is purposeful and beneficial. Though the study investigated a staff of music teachers, the outcomes can likely provide prudent relevance for other curricular areas and professions as well.

### **Significance of the Study for Theoreticians**

P-E Fit Theory had been used extensively in other work settings, but rarely in educational environments. This study applied data into the personal and environmental elements necessary to determine the strength of fit between the two. Analysis of data using the P-E Fit Theory demonstrated a strong fit and alignment of both personal and environment factors for the program staff being studied. Further research is recommended in order to determine how effective the included factors could be relating to overall teacher retention.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Teacher retention continues to be a major challenge for the modern educational system. Researching the factors that could increase the likelihood of a teacher staying in their position longer is worthy of consideration. Replicating this study beyond an orchestra program, a music program, or this district could provide potential benefits to the education profession overall.

Seven teachers were interviewed for this study. Expanding the sample size and studying other school districts could also provide deeper understanding. Additionally, using a theory other than the P-E Fit Theory could potentially present different interpretations. Furthermore, investigation of whether hiring the most qualified candidate versus the one that fits the existing team the best is worthy of future research and could result in increased longevity of teacher retention.

### **Summary**

Maintaining a quality teacher in every classroom is a priority for achieving educational success. The more administrators know about the factors impacting a teachers' decision to stay or leave a position can possibly lead to a higher rate of teacher retention. This study provided information, via the P-E Fit Theory to assist in proactively addressing these factors and their impact on the compatibility between a teacher and their educational environment. The better fit that exists between the individual and the environment can allow for potential increased success through higher retention of teachers.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### International Review Board

Dear Matt McCready,

The Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the following application:

Application Number: IRB-20-564

PI: Matt McCready

Title: Exploring factors influencing teacher retention: A study of an orchestra program staff

Review Level: Exempt

You will find a copy of your Approval Letter in IRBManager. Click [IRB - Initial Submission](#) to go directly to the event page. Please click attachments in the upper left of the screen. The approval letter is under "Generated Docs." Stamped recruitment and consent documents can also be found in this location under "Attachments". Only the approved versions of these documents may be used during the conduct of your research.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

- Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted for IRB approval before implementation.
- Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period.
- Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair within 5 days. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
- Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete by submitting a closure form via IRBManager.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB office at 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

Best of luck with your research,

Sincerely,

Dawnett Watkins, CIP

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Oklahoma State University  
Institutional Review Board  
Office of University Research Compliance  
223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078  
Website: <https://irb.okstate.edu/>  
Ph: 405-744-3377 | Fax: 405-744-4335 | [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu)

## APPENDIX B

### OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

#### EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER RETENTION: A STUDY OF AN ORCHESTRA PROGRAM STAFF

##### **Key Information**

**Study Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore factors that lead to teachers remaining in the same position within a program at a suburban high school in a Midwestern state for the majority of their career despite high turnover rates in the state and within this district.

**Major Procedures of the Study:** Identified teachers will be asked to complete a personal interview

**Duration of Participation:** Data will be collected from December 2020 – April 2021

**Significant Risks:** There are no known risks to participation other than those associated with everyday life

**Potential Benefits:** Retaining teachers can benefit schools, districts, and students greatly. Extensive research has been conducted to investigate reasons why teachers stay in or leave a position. However, very little research has explored the factors that led to a stable program staff remaining together as a team for an extended duration. This study could expand our understanding of the factors that impact teacher retention.

**Compensation:** None

##### **Background Information**

You are invited to be in a research study of factors influencing teacher retention. You were selected as a possible participant because of your tenured experience as an educator. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

**This study is being conducted by:** Matthew McCready, Oklahoma State University Doctoral Candidate, College of Education, Health, and Aviation, School Administration, under the direction of Dr. MaryJo Self, School of Education, Health, and Aviation, Oklahoma State University.

## **Procedures**

### **If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:**

Complete an in-person or virtual interview. You will be audio-recorded. If follow-up questions are needed I will contact you via email for an additional meeting time. Be observed while teaching in your typical day to day classroom setting to help the researcher gain a grasp of the school environment you teach.

**Participation in the study involves the following time commitment:** The interview process will last no more than one hour of your time.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

There are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. To reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19, appropriate precautionary tactics will be used including wearing masks, frequent washing of hands, and maintaining social-distance.

There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researchers learn more about teacher retention and may help increase retention and, in turn, maximize student achievement.

### **Compensation**

You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report

Because of the nature of the data, I cannot guarantee your data will be confidential and it may be possible that others will know what you have reported. The researchers will make every effort to ensure that information about you remains confidential, but cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. However, it may be possible for someone to recognize your particular story/situation/response.

We will collect your information through in-person or virtual interviews and audio recordings. This information will be stored on a secure device with a security code in a locked file cabinet in a restricted-access office. Approximately a year after the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the code list linking names to study numbers will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later than December, 2022. The audio/video recording will be transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately four weeks. This informed consent form will be kept for three years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed. Your data collected as part of this research project, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.



It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are participating in this study online via Zoom. However, your participation in this study involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the Zoom privacy policy at: <https://explore.zoom.us/privacy-and-security>

It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is to not participate. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment in any way.

**Contacts and Questions**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 913-220-7816, [matthew.mccready@okstate.edu](mailto:matthew.mccready@okstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu). All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

Yes       No

I give consent to be contacted for follow-up in this study or future similar studies:

Yes       No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions for Orchestra Teachers

- 1) Discuss your current position, your career trajectory to this position, and how long you have been in your current position. i.e. grades taught, building sites, class sections, etc. Do you continue to perform on your instrument?
- 2) With staff members spending a majority of their teaching career in the orchestra program, talk about your perceptions of factors that may lead to this phenomenon.
- 3) What factors do you perceive to have an impact on teacher retention?
- 4) Discuss challenges you or the program have encountered during your tenure and how you have overcome them.
- 5) Describe the orientation/assimilation process for any new staff members.
- 6) Describe your perception of the environment and community around the orchestra program – feel free to elaborate on building or district administration, various building sites, and parental involvement.

VITA

Matthew Thomas McCready

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER RETENTION: A  
STUDY OF AN ORCHESTRA PROGRAM STAFF

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School  
Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May,  
2021.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Music Education at  
The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas in 2005.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Music Education at  
The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas in 1997.

Experience:

Director of Fine Arts, Union Public Schools, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 2014-Present.

Director of Bands and Associate Director of Fine Arts, Union Public Schools,  
Tulsa, Oklahoma. 2006-2014.

Director of Bands, Blue Valley Northwest High School, Overland Park, Kansas.  
1999-2006.

Assistant Director of Bands, Blue Valley Northwest High School, Overland  
Park, Kansas. 1998-1999.