

AN EXAMINATION OF SYSTEM-STAYERS:
IDENTIFYING SYSTEMIC FACTORS WHICH
LEAD TO TEACHER RETENTION WITHIN SYSTEMS

A Dissertation

by

DONALD W. PHIPPS

Submitted to the Graduate School

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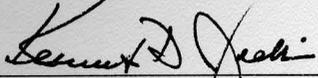
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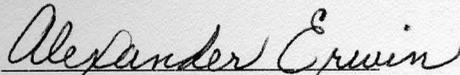
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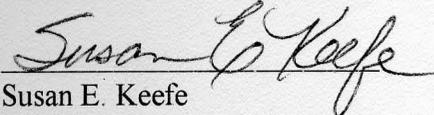
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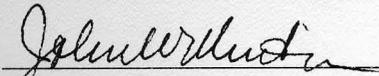
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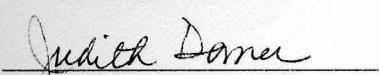
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Abstract

AN EXAMINATION OF SYSTEM-STAYERS: IDENTIFYING SYSTEMIC FACTORS WHICH LEAD TO TEACHER RETENTION WITHIN SYSTEMS (December 1997)

Donald W. Phipps, M.A./C.A.S, Appalachian State University
Ed.D. Appalachian State University
Dissertation Chairperson: Kenneth D. Jenkins, Ed.D.

Veteran classroom teachers and school system superintendents from North Carolina's public schools were studied in an attempt to identify factors within the school systems' control to improve rates of teacher retention. 105 superintendents offered responses to a mailed survey and 69 veteran teachers completed a survey and participated in focus groups. The surveys contained two rating scales which included 26 systemic initiatives found in the literature which could influence teacher career decisions (to stay, move or leave). In the two rating scales, respondents were first asked to rate how important they felt the given initiative was in retaining teachers in the classroom (Rating scale A), and second to rate how well they felt their system had implemented programs to address the initiatives (Rating scale B). In addition, superintendents provided staffing data which were used to calculate a system retention rate for each responding system. School systems were assigned to one of three retention rate levels: high, moderate, or low, based

on their calculated retention rate. Additional verbal data were provided by veteran teachers through focus groups and were used to compare with the quantitative rating scale data obtained and to triangulate the findings with the literature.

Findings suggest that the 26 systemic initiatives make up eight systemic factors. These findings support those previously identified in the literature. Results also suggest that school systems cannot be differentiated along retention rate levels by those systemic factors. Qualitative data suggest further that non-school related factors, those felt to be beyond a school system's control, must be considered when investigating teacher career decisions. The general perception that systemic factors, by themselves, serve to heavily influence teachers career decisions is less than certain.

Recommendations for future study include a focus on variables associated with the external environment of the school system. These variables may include alternative employment opportunities and the setting (size, culture, mores). Other non-system factors which bear further investigation are personal. They include ties to the community and family issues. Also of note were several verbal comments which suggested that improving teacher retention must begin with positive treatment of new or beginning teachers. Additionally, it was recommended that policies be studied to determine if funds directed toward improving teacher retention activities were resulting in higher teacher retention rates.