

UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPAL'S EXPERIENCE WITH TEACHER
ORGANIZATIONS WHEN DISMISSING UNDERPERFORMING TEACHERS

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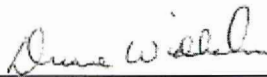
The undersigned, approved by the Department Chair of Graduate Studies in Education, have examined a dissertation entitled:

UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPAL'S EXPERIENCE WITH TEACHER
ORGANIZATIONS WHEN DISMISSING UNDERPERFORMING TEACHERS

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UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPAL'S EXPERIENCE WITH TEACHER
ORGANIZATIONS WHEN DISMISSING UNDERPERFORMING TEACHERS

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES..... v

ABSTRACT..... vi

CHAPTER ONE 1

INTRODUCTION 1

Theoretical Framework 5

Problem Statement..... 6

Purpose of the Study 8

Research Questions..... 9

Significance of the Study..... 9

Definition of Key Terms 10

Limitations 11

Delimitations..... 12

Assumptions 13

Design Controls 13

Summary 15

CHAPTER TWO 19

Introduction..... 19

Historical Background..... 20

Tenure 25

Inferences for Forthcoming Study 54

Summary 55

CHAPTER THREE 56

Introduction..... 56

Purpose of the Study 57

Research Questions..... 57

Summary 65

CHAPTER FOUR..... 66

Introduction..... 66

Participants..... 67

Verification/Trustworthiness..... 68

<i>Data Analysis</i>	69
<i>Coding Procedures and Theme Development</i>	74
<i>Analysis of Theme 1: Coalitions and Conflict</i>	76
<i>Analysis of Theme 2: Relationships and Growth</i>	80
<i>Analysis of Theme 3: Motivation and Agendas</i>	83
<i>Summary</i>	86
CHAPTER FIVE	87
<i>Introduction</i>	87
<i>Research Questions</i>	88
<i>Limitations</i>	88
<i>Summary of Methods</i>	90
<i>Summary of Findings</i>	91
<i>Discussion</i>	96
<i>Educational Implications</i>	99
<i>Recommendations for Future Research</i>	102
<i>Summary</i>	103
REFERENCES	105
Appendix A	117
Appendix B	118
Appendix C	119
Appendix D	120

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information.....	76
Table 2: Top Five Most Commonly Used Vocabulary.....	79
Table 3: Interview and Transcript Length.....	80
Table 4: Record of Coded Information.....	83
Table 5: Record of Coded Information – Coalitions and Conflict.....	85
Table 6: Record of Coded Information – Relationships and Growth.....	89
Table 7: Record of Coded Information – Motivation and Agenda.....	91

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the experiences of a principal's perceptions with teacher organizations when dismissing an underperforming teacher. There is a lack of data showing what barriers might influence a principal when having to make this kind of decision. The historical aspect of teacher organizations is discussed at length due to the change in their influence and reach into the schools over the years. The purpose of interviewing administrators with varying lengths of experience was to discover if the influence of teacher organizations has changed over the years in such a way that it might influence a principal's decision. The researcher used Bolman and Deal's theories of political and human resources for this study for two main reasons. When making the decision to dismiss a teacher a principal must work around the entities in power that establish the rules of procedures for dismissal, as well as the human aspect of dealing with personalities, maintaining empathy, and dealing with conflict with another person. Interviews were used to discover if varying lengths of experience within the role of principal changed the perspective of a principal's experience with the teacher organizations when having to dismiss an underperforming teacher.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the influence teacher organizations have in today's educational environment, it is important to understand how they started, the original intent, and the changes that have occurred over the years in the role they played in education. The research for this paper highlighted the significance in the role of teacher organizations since the inception and what, if any, influence they have had in principals choosing to go through the process of dismissing an underperforming teacher. It discussed changes that occurred over the years and the role teacher organizations now play in education. Barnum (2019), an education researcher for Brown University, wrote, "Unions – it's complicated, because they're not just the oppositional force that a lot of people want to paint them but they're not only the champions of education and learning that they might portray themselves to be" (para. 5). Chapter One will introduce the beginning of teacher organizations, how and why they came to be, and the varied purposes for which they were created.

The very first labor union was organized and recognized at a convention in Baltimore in 1866. The National Labor Union was created to help fight against the dangerous working conditions, overworked laborers, and measly wages that continued in the textile factories in Rhode Island (Loomis, 2018). The focus in the industrial revolution was making the most products as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to increase revenue. There was little to no thought of workers' rights or safety (Loomis, 2018).

The fight for unfair working conditions in the world of education continued at the same time that workers revolted against the textile industry. The movement surrounding the formation of teacher unions started in the 1800s with a small delegation of teachers from Philadelphia, but grew to large numbers in a fairly short amount of time. By 1920, the union had grown too large to be represented by a small group of individuals. The National Education Agency (NEA, 2020) reported that it became a Representative Assembly composed of delegates from states and locals that had formed unions (Holcomb, 2021).

The American Federation of Teacher's, the first teacher union established in 1916, first efforts strove towards improving teacher salaries, educating emancipated slaves, and passing child labor laws (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2019). Teacher unions continued to work toward improving salaries in the early 1920s, but moved on to challenge the issue of discrimination against female teachers. An example of female discrimination included the requirements that female teachers wear certain clothing and be actively involved in church. Discrimination also included dictating how often a woman would be allowed to date (AFT, 2019). This was considered unreasonable by the union so these became the next issues addressed during negotiations.

Between the 1920s and 1940s, strikes were rare because those who chose to take part in such activities were quickly fired. The influence of the teacher unions expanded again toward improving the conditions of the schools and increasing federal funding. The 1950s brought about the fight for racial equality and in 1957, history was made when Wisconsin voted to pass legislation allowing collective bargaining

for public employees (Holcomb, 2021). At a 1962 NEA convention, the organization “adopted a resolution declaring in part that the NEA insists on the right of professional associations to participate with boards of education in the determination of policies of common concern, including salary and other conditions of employment” (Wildman, 1964, p. 11).

The Missouri legislature enacted public sector labor laws in 1965 by which public employees could join labor unions and conduct collective bargaining.

Kahlenberg and Greene (2012) stated teachers gained true power when collective bargaining began in the 1960s. What started as a small delegation of teachers was now a national organization that began bargaining for better pay and improved working conditions.

With the addition of tenure, the purpose started to change. Teachers who were released from their contracts in the past were now kept in the classroom because they had earned tenure. The process by which to remove a teacher who had earned tenure was arduous, and required much time with documentation and paperwork. Grauf (2015) discussed this issue in his research about barriers to dismissal. He stated principals’ lack of time would continue to be a barrier to dismissing a teacher unless the structure of leadership was changed.

Union organizations indeed provided many positive benefits for teachers. Collective bargaining allowed for competitive pay and retirement benefits, less-demanding work conditions, and higher job security (Kahlenberg & Greene, 2012). This research was intended to show whether the experience a principal had with teacher organizations influenced a principal’s decision to dismiss an underperforming

teacher or if there were other factors that were more influential. In an article written by Kahlenberg and Greene (2012), the issue of teacher organizations was debated regarding whether teacher unions should be expanded or if the influence wielded by the organizations should be limited. The article surmised that the reach of the unions had extended so deep into the field of education that there was more control than there was originally intended to be (Kahlenberg & Greene, 2012).

Nixon, Packard, and Douvanis (2010) discussed that principals believed there were two main barriers to dismissing ineffective teachers the tenure laws supported. These barriers included the tenure laws supported by teacher unions and the inordinate amount of time required by the unions to dismiss an ineffective teacher. The NEA, an organization representing approximately two and a half million teachers, is only involved in a few cases in which teachers are dismissed. These cases only number in the hundreds. (Nixon et al., 2010). The small percentage of dismissals could lead a reader to question what influences exist for such a small number.

This topic is important to the field of education in order to better understand the experience principals have had with teacher organizations when making decisions to dismiss underperforming teachers. Students are the future of our nation. The amount of quality education they receive in our public schools will dictate, in part, how successful they are in the future. A strong foundation for a student is the basis for success in adulthood. This is why educational leaders should consider the implications of teacher organizations' influence on principals. If principals are keeping ineffective or underperforming teachers in classrooms because of pressures and difficulties given the task of dismissing a tenured teacher, education is doing a

disservice to our students. Ferchen (2012) found in her research that “quality teaching is one of the most important factors that contribute to the success of a student” (p. 1). As educators, we must not only strive to hire and maintain quality teachers, but work to dismiss those teachers that are ineffective and consistently underperforming in the classroom.

Chapter One will introduce the history of the teacher organizations and the growth seen over the years. The research will present the introduction of collective bargaining and tenure for organization members. It will also present the theoretical framework used for the study, explaining the importance of Bolman and Deal (2008) to the study, the problem statement, and definition of key terms.

Theoretical Framework

This research was guided by Bolman and Deal’s (2008) leadership frame theory, specifically, the political frame. This framework revolves around the ideas of power, conflict, and coalition (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This framework relates to the study in the sense that when an administrator or district is attempting to assess the effectiveness of a teacher and whether their contract should be renewed, the political aspect of dealing with teacher organizations comes into play. Today, dealing with these organizations may mean having to meet with a representative if there are issues with teachers who are members. It means keeping a good working relationship with the organization, and understanding the items of collective bargaining. One of Bolman and Deal’s political assumptions speaks to the issue of coalition members seeing things very differently. These members can have inherently different ideas about what is important, belief systems that can vary, and the perception of the reality

of a situation can differ greatly (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This is important in the field of education because it is important for an administrator to understand that the perception of the teacher and their performance may be very different from that of the administrator. If the teacher has the support of a teacher organization, it can make the situation more difficult if the administrator chooses to nonrenew that teacher's contract.

An additional framework informing this research was the human resource frame of Bolman and Deal (2008). The human resource frame describes dealing with people and understanding their many needs. An administrator does not want to lose a valued employee or effective teacher. One of the goals of an administrator is to be an instructional coach for teachers and to assist in areas where a teacher needs to grow. In order to be effective with this, it is necessary to understand the needs of those teachers. Hall (2019) stated the fact that evaluating a teacher that needed improvement was one of an administrator's hardest jobs. The task needs to be done in a direct and honest manner where principals are clear with their expectations and gave frequent feedback (Hall, 2019). Bolman and Deal stated there are few employers who spend the time needed to train and develop loyal, dedicated employees. Time must be invested in a faculty to build efficacy and pedagogy. If this time is truly invested, an administrator will know exactly who needs to be maintained as one of the exceptional teachers, and who should be dismissed due to underperformance.

Problem Statement

There is a gap in research exploring the principal's experience with teacher organizations when attempting to dismiss an underperforming teacher. Therefore, the

goal of this study was to investigate if procedures created around tenure could affect a principal's decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher (Jacobs, 2016). There is a series of procedures to which an administrator must adhere to when dismissing an underperforming teacher. These procedures are necessary in order to give teachers due process when being considered for dismissal. The difficulty, at times, lies in the amount of time and paperwork required by the tenure laws. This task can be arduous and difficult for administrators (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010).

The literature clearly showed there are two opposing groups and beliefs when it comes to the topic of tenure. Jacob (2011) discussed both sides of the debate including mentioning that principals are able to distinguish a good teacher from an ineffective teacher and, on the opposite side, he stated that collective bargaining agreements made it difficult to dismiss tenured and nontenured teachers (Jacob, 2011). Those that supported tenure did so because it required administrators to give teachers due process and prevented principals from firing for unfair reasons. The side that opposed tenure did so because of the belief that it allowed underperforming teachers to remain in the classroom (Jacob, 2011). Tucker (2012) also made arguments on both sides of the issue in the article "A Different Role for Teachers Unions?" Tucker argued the benefits of having a strong union and how tenure was a benefit offered to teachers within the Missouri Public School System. On the opposite side, teachers' organizations could also make it challenging for an administrator. Marianno (2015) argued this point in an article written for *Education Next*, stating that teacher organizations worked solely to benefit its members, which in turn, disregarded what was best for the most important people, the students. Smith,

Imig, and Smith's (2019) research argued that without collective bargaining, legislators could try to eliminate tenure without the input of teachers, much like what occurred in North Carolina. Whether an educator believes in supporting unions or not, it would be important to understand what influence these entities had on an administrator when deciding whether to dismiss an underperforming teacher (Marianno, 2015). There is a need for this study to add knowledge in this area of educational research to understand what principals' experiences are with teacher organizations when trying to make decisions around teacher dismissals. This study will fill a gap in the research regarding the principal's experience with dismissing an underperforming teacher and any influence teacher organizations might have in these cases.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand what experiences principals had when dismissing an underperforming teacher. The experience is generally defined as those aspects of the process that principals felt hindered them from moving forward with a dismissal of an underperforming teacher. The study strove to discover if the principal perceived teacher organizations, in their support of teacher tenure, created barriers to dismissal for principals dismissing underperforming teachers or if that was a misconception held by administrators. Principals of varying lengths of service in Missouri were used in order to discover if a principal's perception changed based on the number of years of service and the changes with teacher reform over the years.

The influence of the teacher organizations and the tenure laws created due process for teachers. Historically, without these laws, teachers could be fired for undue cause (Jacobs, 2016). The question was if the principal's experience with the teacher organizations and tenure laws was a positive one, or one that caused an arduous task creating barriers to dismissal when dismissing an underperforming teacher.

Research Questions

The following central research question and subquestions guided the study:

What is the principal's experience with teacher organizations and tenure laws when dismissing an underperforming teacher?

- a. What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as barriers from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?
- b. What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as a benefit from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?
- c. What experience has the principal had with changes in the focus of teacher organizations in schools during the principal's tenure?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will benefit education in revealing a greater understanding of the principal's experience with teacher organizations when dismissing an underperforming teacher. Schools will benefit from this study in not only understanding the principal's experience, but in being able to possibly improve or change the process to make certain that students have the best teachers in the

classroom. The role of the principal is to ensure that each student is getting the best quality education by design, not by chance (Hattie, 2012).

There are studies that analyze the benefits and challenges of tenure as well as the debates over tenure reform. There are few studies that delve into the principal's experience with-teacher organizations. This study will increase our understanding of the interaction between principal and teacher organizations.

Hiring and keeping quality teachers is a task given to every principal. Having to recommend dismissal of an underperforming teacher is also a challenge that principals will face. Understanding the perception of challenges presented during this time for principals will assist in understanding what, if any, improvements could be made to the educational system in this area.

Definition of Key Terms

Defining key terms is included in this research to help understand this study. Key terms are defined as follows:

Administration/Administrator. Holcomb (2021) defined an administrator as “performing key functions in the maintenance and development of schools, their faculty and their students” (para. 1). For the purpose of this research, these terms refer to the principal in a secondary building.

Collective Bargaining. Bolman and Deal (2008) defined collective bargaining as the process of workers and management meeting to find an agreeable compromise over areas that are causing division between the two groups.

Contract. A teacher contract details the time of service a teacher is expected to work at a school within a specific district. This time period includes an entire

school year, with the addition of several days for teacher preparation (Missouri State Teachers Association, 2018).

DESE – The Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE, n.d.) is a government agency that has the mission to guarantee the superior preparation and performance of every child in school and in life.

Teacher Unions. This term refers to the organizations that assist in the collective bargaining process for teachers in Missouri. These organizations include The Missouri State Teacher’s Association, The National Education Association, and The American Federation of Teachers (Holcomb, 2021).

Tenure. This term refers to a teacher that is no longer considered to be a probationary teacher within the district in which they are employed. The amount of time a teacher must remain within a school district in Missouri to be considered for tenure is 5 years (Toloudis, 2019).

Limitations

The limitations of this study were as follows:

1. There was a possible issue with true responses. The researcher could not control whether statements from participants were completely honest. This was addressed by informing each participant that participation was confidential. The only information shared was the number of years of service, no names, and answers to questions.
2. There was a possibility a participant in the study held bias towards teacher organizations or the tenure system. A definition of bias was given to each participant with the understanding that if they held bias toward any part of

the subject matter, they would voluntarily remove themselves as a participant.

3. There was a potential for participant dropout. If a participant chose not to participate, another participant with the same years of experience was chosen to replace them. The information gathered from DESE was used to choose the next participant with the same range of years of experience.
4. Due to the narrative nature of the research, the researcher was limited to the responses provided by each participant. Follow-up questions were asked for clarity when necessary.
5. Participants may not have been completely representative of the entire population, but should shed light on any commonalities of principals from varying lengths of experience in their profession.

Delimitations

1. The study was geographically focused in Missouri using principals of varying range of experience.
2. The researcher asked each participant the same questions with the possibility of follow-up questions for clarification.
3. The building level of the study was secondary schools with questions asked only of a person who held the position of principal with grades starting in at least the seventh grade that had experience in dismissing underperforming teachers.

4. The foundation of the study was based upon the political and human frameworks of Bolman and Deal's (2008) leadership model. The researcher focused on the principles of both during the interviews.
5. The study was conducted to understand if there were any barriers to dismissal due to teacher organizations and tenure laws for principals. There were many other factors that could have been considered barriers, but for the sake of this study, the researcher focused on this aspect.

Assumptions

1. Participants were honest in their responses. Principals that agreed to participate would do so with the knowledge that their participation was confidential. Demographic information shared included years of service, and the number of times they participated in dismissing an underperforming teacher. The name of the principal was not shared.
2. Participants met all criteria, including years of experience and having had dismissed underperforming teachers. A principal's years of experience was verified using information from DESE.
3. It was assumed that each participant would remain in the study throughout the duration of the interviews.

Design Controls

The limitations and delimitations were each controlled in the following ways. The first limitation was honesty of participants. This limitation was controlled with an explanation regarding the confidentiality provided to each participant. This would encourage honesty in answers. The second limitation was the possibility that a

participant might hold bias towards teacher organizations or the tenure system. Definitions of the teacher organizations, tenure, and bias were provided at the onset of interviews. Participants that held bias toward any of the research elements were asked to decline as a participant. The third limitation was the possibility that a participant might choose to back out of the study before the completion of the research. Alternate participants with similar years of experience were chosen using DESE information in case of an instance in which a participant chose to no longer participate. The fourth limitation was the amount of information collected and was based upon the answers provided by participants. Follow-up questions were prepared for each subquestion that allowed for clarity of answers. The fifth, and final, limitation was the possibility that the participants may not have been completely representative of the opinions of the population of principals in Missouri. The reliability of the study was controlled by confirming participants' years of service in DESE, reviewing recordings of interviews, and concept mapping. The researcher asked broad and specific questions in an attempt to gather as much information as possible in regard to their experiences.

There were also five delimitations in this study. The first was that all participants would be from Missouri. The researcher used information from DESE to choose participants from this area. The second delimitation was that each participant was asked the same set of questions. The researcher prepared questions in advance that were given to other principals to test the reliability and validity before using them with the participants in the study. The third delimitation was that the researcher based the research on Bolman and Deal's (2008) leadership model, specifically using the

political and human frameworks. The foundation of this model was defined to each participant prior to the interview questions being asked. The fourth and final delimitation was the fact that there were many facets of dismissing a teacher that a principal could consider a barrier to this process. For this reason, the researcher focused primarily on the influence of teacher organizations and tenure laws.

This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted using a group of principals ranging in years of experience that participated in the process of dismissing teachers. The group of secondary principals was located in Missouri. The central research question regarding what a principal's experience with teacher organizations and tenure laws had been when dismissing an underperforming teacher was asked of each participant. The researcher expected the answers to vary depending on the length of time in their position and the number of teacher dismissals in which they had been involved, but also expected to find a common thread throughout the questioning.

The focus of the teacher organizations has changed over the years. The purpose of interviewing principals with varying lengths of experience was to see if the principal's experience with teacher organizations changed depending on the length of time in service. The study used interview questions structured to gain insight into principal perceptions and experiences. The questions provided were open-ended questions where principals were allowed to expand on their experience with teacher organizations. Follow-up questions were asked for clarity.

Summary

The formation of the teacher unions strove to improve teacher salaries and improve working conditions. The influence of these organizations next expanded

their work to increase federal funding (Holcomb, 2021). Unions began to fight for racial equality, and then strove to create collective bargaining for educators.

The purpose of this study was to explore the principal's experience with teacher organizations when attempting to dismiss an underperforming teacher. The goal of this study was to fill the gap in literature involving the true understanding of the principal's experience when attempting to do this part of their job. There is research that supports and opposes teacher organizations, but there is little that discusses the principal's experience with them. The intent of this research was to determine what a principal experiences with teacher organizations when dismissing an underperforming teacher, and if what they experienced is necessary when attempting to create a learning environment that is created by design and not by chance (Kraft & Hattie, 2021). Understanding the experience a principal has in trying to dismiss an underperforming teacher could assist in creating a systematized approach for training, expectations, and next steps when teachers fail to perform under these requirements.

The theoretical framework of this study taken from Bolman and Deal's (2008) leadership theories were the political frame and the human resource frame. The human resource frame in this theory was based, partly, on the assumption that "organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 122). The study sought the experience of principals with teacher organizations when trying to make the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. Another assumption under this frame is that humans and organizations need each other (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Administrators and teacher organizations must

work together collaboratively in order to grow and nurture teachers. They must also work together if there is a situation in which a teacher needs to be dismissed from their contract. If a principal's experience with teacher organizations has been positive and supportive during this process, it is possible that they will support the core theory of Bolman and Deal and believe that teacher organizations are in place to serve human needs rather than the organization. In contrast, if the experience with teacher organizations during this process was difficult and arduous, a principal's experience may be negative and believe the teacher organization was concerned only with protecting its members. The findings revealed that there is not a definitive reason as to the cause of the arduous process but could become informative in steps to help improve how to verify teachers are getting the training they need to ensure best practices for students are provided.

The political frame of Bolman and Deal (2008) guided much of this research in the sense that the political frame was based around the conflict between individual versus group interests. As the literature review will show, there are two opposite perspectives when it comes to teacher organizations and the influence they may have in a school and with a principal when deciding to dismiss an underperforming teacher.

Chapter One provided information about the strength and influence of teacher organizations specifically in Missouri. Chapter Two includes a review of literature organized chronologically following the history of teacher unions, the role of tenure, the beginning of collective bargaining, and the perceptions of those that support and oppose union and teacher organizations' involvement in the hiring and maintaining of

effective teachers. This chapter concluded with information about the strength and influence of teacher organizations specifically in Missouri. Chapter Three includes a description of the methodology of research. Chapter Four outlines results of the data analysis. The results and conclusions are provided Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Teaching is an immensely important job. Hiring, growing, and keeping excellent teachers in the classroom is something principals strive to do. When a teacher is not performing well, a principal, at times, is faced with nonrenewing a teacher. This process can be arduous and difficult. The principal must follow district policy and procedures, as well as deal with any influence the teacher organizations may have in the process. This research added to the field of education by creating a better understanding of the relationship and influence the teacher organizations have on a principal when making decisions to dismiss an underperforming teacher.

Chapter Two will introduce further the historical background of teacher organizations, along with the role tenure and collective bargaining play within unions and for teachers. The positions of those who support teacher organizations as well as those who oppose the unions is discussed. In addition, information within the review of literature was collected through a national lens and filtered through a lens specifically focusing on practices found in the state of Missouri regarding teacher unions, tenure, and collective bargaining. The importance of Bolman and Deal (2008) to the study is explored. The chapter also relates inferences for forthcoming studies.

Research was completed for the literature review by encompassing topics within the scope of teacher unions, collective bargaining, tenure, teacher dismissal, barriers to dismissal, and other related topics. The research sought to determine if the scope of teacher organizations has grown throughout the years, and the reach of their

influence into the building level and classroom has as well. The gap in literature that is addressed in this study is whether the principal's experience with teacher unions has been a barrier for principals when making decisions to dismiss an underperforming teacher, or whether there are other factors that become barriers when dealing with teacher dismissals.

Historical Background

The evolution of organized labor unions in the United States began during the 19th century with the beginning of the first factories that were built in Rhode Island. The creation of machines that allowed for increased speeds in cotton spinning and shortly thereafter the invention of the cotton gin, a machine that separated the seeds from the boll, allowed the textile industry to produce cloth at speeds owners had never seen (Loomis, 2018). The ability to increase production speeds increased the number of workers needed as well as the number of hours worked each day. The working conditions were appalling, the new machines were dangerous, and a normal working day could last well past 14 to 18 hours, 6 days a week. With the need for additional workers, children were also employed during this time. In Loomis's (2018) research, he found the need for mass production of goods meant children were employed alongside adults. The mill owners attracted thousands of workers to the area hoping for the American Dream. Instead they found a job that never allowed them to get out of poverty with working conditions that threatened their lives (Loomis, 2018). By the early 1800s there were almost 150 mills within 30 miles of Providence that employed 10s of thousands of workers (Loomis, 2018).

The industry continued to grow, while working conditions and wages remained dismal. Workers began to rebel in the form of unions. Many of the first labor unions were secretive due to threats of violence or dismissal from their jobs (Rowe, 2006). Workers continued to fight for better working conditions and wages. The end of the Civil War brought about the conception of the first organized unions they called the National Labor Union. This was the beginning of workers banding together to form a union in which to fight for their rights (Loomis, 2018).

Teachers were not far behind. Working conditions were challenging for many teachers as well. Chmielewski (2018) discussed this in her research about working conditions for teachers from the 1920s to the 1940s. Specifically, buildings were in ill repair, the ventilation in many buildings was nonexistent; gas furnaces leaked, and poor lighting was expected. Many teachers went home feeling ill (Chmielewski, 2018). Like the factory workers of the time, teachers used the influence of teacher organizations to assist in improving their working conditions.

Teacher unions were founded in 1870 (Holcomb, 2021). The original focus was improving teachers' meager wages and teaching conditions. It consisted of a small number of teachers fighting for their rights. The movement toward improving conditions for teachers by creating tenure continued on in the late 1880s. The NEA published a report in 1885 that advocated for tenure for teachers to protect against unfair practices. It felt that by creating a tenure system, teachers would be protected against unfair practices, discrimination, and political agendas (Christie & Zinth, 2011).

Robson, Pennington, and Squire (2018) discussed the reason behind the formation of teacher unions and the need to protect teachers. Their research gave examples of the poor working conditions faced by teachers and duties required during contract time that had no educational purpose. These tasks could include such things as supervision scheduled during designated lunch breaks, maintenance work on the facility, grounds keeping, custodial duties, or having to use a time clock (Robson et al., 2018).

Howlett and Howlett (2019) described yet other issues that arose for teachers during time of war. If a teacher did not agree and support the government's position during wartime, it was not uncommon for them to be labeled as a pacifist, followed shortly by dismissal of services or refusal to renew their teaching certificate (Howlett & Howlett, 2019). By 1920, the union had grown too large to be represented by a small group of individuals, and NEA became a Representative Assembly composed of delegates from states and locals that had formed unions (Holcomb, 2021).

Research performed by Procon (2018) reported, "by 1940, 70% of K-12 public school teachers had job protections. In the mid-1950's the number grew to over 80%" (para. 4). In 1959, Wisconsin broke ground when it became the first state to pass a collective bargaining law for teachers. This law became the first of many that helped begin the movement that worked to improve teacher conditions (Holcomb, 2021).

The unions helped pass legislation that increased teachers' wages to be equivalent to those workers protected by unions outside of education (Tucker, 2012). At a 1962 NEA convention, the organization passed a resolution that NEA would participate in negotiations with boards of education in order to improve policies,

working conditions, and salaries (Wildman, 1964). Strom and Baxter (2001) discussed the fact that the courts have also been an immense force in helping to establish labor relations for people in the public education system. Today, there are more than 60% of teachers in the United States working in a district that has a contract with the union or has a strong union influence (Lovenheim & Willen, 2016).

Bolman and Deal's (2008) political framework should be considered by administrators when there are a number of teachers that are represented by teacher unions. This framework revolves around the importance of knowing and understanding the political frameworks with which you are working. Thus, it is imperative that a principal understands and follows the procedures set forth by the district and agreed upon union. All states in the country have different agreements. In Missouri, the Missouri chapter of the National Education Association (MNEA), "believes that employees shall have the right to organize and to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing" (Shipma, 2021, para. 1). This was a ruling supported since 2007. From that, each district contains a set of procedures and protocols that must be followed. Procedures, policies, and outlined courses of action are all important concepts for a principal to be aware of when the time comes to either coach a teacher into being more effective, or work through the process of dismissing an underperforming teacher.

The NEA shares influence in the world of teacher unions with several organizations, but the second largest to NEA is the American Federation of Teachers Union, or AFT. The AFT was founded in 1916 in Chicago and is affiliated with the National Federation of Labor (American Federation of Teachers, 2015). Like NEA,

the AFT was formed in the beginning to fight for better wages and unfair practices. The AFT fought many of the same battles as NEA, but more in the southernmost states. Antonucci (2015) stated that together these organizations form one of the most influential and powerful entities when it comes to creating education policies. He continued to discuss the struggles of both unions and the fact that although people wanted the unions to lead positive change in education, their focus continued instead to be protecting teachers and the agenda of the union. The Missouri School Board Association (MSBA) supported the notion that NEA, MSTA, the Missouri State Teachers Association, and NEA are the largest employee organizations to support teachers, but also recognized that any group formed to protect the rights of its members, even if they were not officially recognized, could be considered a union (Missouri State Teachers Association, 2018). Although both of these organizations represent teachers in public school systems today they remain the largest teachers' unions representing the majority of those individuals in education (Robson et al., 2018).

The influence of teacher organizations varies from state to state. Some states – such as Washington, California, Pennsylvania and New York – are considered to have strong union influence (Northern, Scull & Shaw, 2012). These states also mandate school districts participate in collective bargaining with teacher unions (Han, 2019). The collective bargaining process in states including Washington, California, and Oregon bargain for wages, work conditions, evaluation protocols, instructional minutes, and professional development minutes.

Research stated that in Iowa “of 362 school districts, more than 96% have unions” (Goldammer, 2020, p.1). The size of the districts varied from large to very small. In Kansas a majority of school districts participate in collective bargaining through union representation. The article also stated there were virtually no districts in Nebraska without union representation and Illinois has 96.7% of its districts that are unionized (Goldammer, 2020). Although Missouri is not considered to be a “union” state, the number of school districts that have active unions used for such things as collective bargaining and to continue to support tenure is large.

Tenure

Tenure is defined by The Education Commission of the States as “not a job guarantee but rather a job security device protecting against termination of employment in cases where there are not grounds for termination or where the teacher has no fair opportunity to present a defense” (Christie et al., 2011, para. 3). Goldhaber and Walch (2016) stated after the first tenure law was passed in 1909 in New Jersey, many other states did the same and by the 1940s, over half of all teachers had become tenured. Toloudis (2019) discussed as to the Tenure Law of 1937 the strength and protection that tenure offered teachers due to the teacher organization’s strong support of tenure laws. The research clearly showed that there are widely varying opinions of whether tenure is a benefit or a detriment to the educational system.

Tenure was originally established in higher education (Roache, 2015). There is a general consensus that there are issues with the current system. The Vergara court case stated that by allowing teachers to receive tenure, the education system was allowing ineffective teachers to stay in teaching positions (Gottlieb, 2020). This, in

turn, was affecting the quality of education students should be receiving in the classroom (Clay, 2015). Kahlenberg (2015) stated that the two areas that needed the most change were the process of earning tenure, and the process administrators must follow to remove a teacher from the classroom (Kahlenberg, 2015). Edwards (2014) also discussed the effect unions have had in creating difficulties in regard to dismissing an underperforming teacher. Removing a tenured teacher from a classroom is an arduous process for an administrator that involves tedious, meticulous documentation, and numerous teacher evaluations that are used as a basis for the documentation. Kahlenberg's research also supported this stance when he discussed the critics of tenure that claimed the process had turned into an "uber process." Removing a tenured teacher took considerable time and cost a district thousands of dollars (Kahlenberg, 2015). In an article about removing weak links, or ineffective teachers, DeNisco (2014) reiterated the idea that tenured teachers that challenged their dismissal could cost a district hundreds of thousands of dollars. Futernick (2010) discussed the same issues when he wrote that the role of the teacher union seemed to have put such pressure on administrators in education that many ineffective teachers were not removed from a classroom for fear of the lengthy time process and expense it would cost the district.

Another study done by Angelle and Lomascolo (2020) discussed the importance of allowing principals' input in tenure reform. If principals had to make decisions about recommending teachers for tenure or dismissing teachers, more buy-in from this group was needed. It would make sense to include this group of professionals in the decisions about what needed to change with tenure since

principals were the individuals who had to carry out the policies established from tenure. The study continued stating that even if the policies behind tenure were perfect, they did no good if the people that had to enforce them would not implement them.

Nixon, Kimbrel, Packard, and Nhekairo (2020) stated there were teachers that were grossly ineffective being left in the classroom due to tenure. Herreid, Prud'homme-Genereux, Schillier, Herreid and Wright (2015) went as far as to compare tenure to a sea squirt in his research. A sea squirt spends its life floating around in the ocean until it finally finds somewhere to stick, where it remains, floating aimlessly, the remainder of its life (Herreid et al., 2015). The comparison of a tenured teacher getting a lifelong job where they no longer have to do anything but “float” is not flattering, but the criticism is similar to other critics of tenure.

Michelle Rhee served as the chancellor of Washington, DC, public schools for a period of 3 years in the early 2000s. During this time, she was a huge critic of teacher tenure, calling it the “single greatest flaw in public education” (Huang, 2019, Slide 46). Huang’s (2019) research used Rhee’s tenure as a basis for his study to determine teacher attitudes toward tenure laws. Most participants agreed that tenure was an important part of a teacher’s job safety and there were numerous benefits to keeping it. One teacher in the study discussed the fact that they believed tenure was an assurance of due process from being fired unlawfully, but not necessarily a guarantee of a lifelong job (Huang, 2019).

Tiede (2018) discussed the concept of herd immunity with tenure. He found that tenure could benefit even those teachers that were not yet tenured. Much like

using this concept with developing immunity towards a virus, Tiede found tenure could be a benefit for untenured teachers from the attitude and respect people held for tenure, much like an umbrella effect.

Goldhaber and Walch (2016) continued the debate over teacher tenure. The research laid out the arguments for parties on both sides of the ongoing tenure debate. It also shared that tenure reform laws passed over recent years made the field of teaching less attractive to choose as a career. The lack of protection for new teachers due to many states extending the time that it took to earn tenure meant less job security for probationary teachers (Hardin, 2019).

Loeb, Miller, & Wyckoff (2015) found tenure could protect experienced teachers during times where money was tight and principals were trying to find money for the budget. Goldhaber and Walch (2016) further stated that since the start of tenure reform in 2010, tenure laws no longer had the strength they once did. As with much of the research written about teacher tenure and the laws that support it, Goldhaber and Walch found tenure might affect the number of ineffective teachers kept in the classroom. They repeated a sentiment often found in other research that much of the argument over tenure was around the question of whether tenure made it too difficult to dismiss tenured teachers who were ineffective in the classroom.

Black (2016) also discussed the perception that there was an issue with tenure and that by eliminating tenure the system would be taking its first step to reform the system. Black claimed that tenure locks in status quo. Black also stated that many of the changes that were attempted by legislation were blocked by the strength of the teacher organizations. The article compared the lack of equitable funding for higher

need schools and claimed tenure created a violation to students' educational rights. Tenure created a challenge to replacing ineffective teachers, resulting in an inequity for students. The inequity existed in having some teachers who were less effective than others teaching our students. Black further stated the issues with ineffective teaching did not lie solely with tenure and the unions, but was "multifaceted" and would not be solved by simply removing tenure from the educational system.

Futernick (2010) made a similar point when referring to a speech made by President Obama addressing the issue of education in 2009.

Let me be clear. If a teacher is given a chance or two chances or three chances but still does not improve, there's no excuse for that person to continue teaching. I reject a system that rewards failure and protects a person from its consequences. (Futernick, 2010, p. 60)

Bonnett's (2010) research about Schauer, the superintendent for The Lodi Unified School District, a struggling district in California, supported this opinion as well. Although the district was struggling, Superintendent Schauer talked about the importance of removing an ineffective teacher if they had been given the chance to improve and had not done so; tenure should not be a reason to keep an ineffective teacher (Bonnett, 2010). Other research also showed of those teachers who were needing to be removed, only 1 in 27 were actually dismissed (Mitchell, 2011).

Principals, when contemplating dismissing an ineffective teacher, have the opportunity to consider Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource framework. The current study was centered around Bolman and Deal's work because of the importance involved in knowing and understanding an employee. The human

resource framework is about employee satisfaction and knowing that an employee is the most important part of any organization. It is important that an administrator knows why the teacher is struggling and be prepared to offer support where and when needed.

McNeal (2013) stated the conflict over collective bargaining between administration and teachers was a big part of the tenure system. His research stated that after receiving tenure, teachers were largely believed to have earned a job for life. The only exception to this would be behavior that earned a teacher immediate dismissal (Hess & Maranto, 2000). The protections tenure offered for teachers varied from state to state, but Strom and Baxter (2001) stated that a teacher normally earned tenure after serving a number of years at a probationary level. Tenure should protect a teacher from dismissal without due process. It should not protect a teacher that showed incompetence or showed egregious behavior, such as sexual misconduct, immoral acts, or disobeying the law (McNeal, 2013).

McNeal's (2013) research pointed out that there should be ways for legislation to create laws that helped teachers maintain a fair and equitable job experience without infringing on their rights. In a study entitled, "By the Numbers," completed by Dianis (2006), research showed 77% of superintendents and 72% of principals polled believed that improving the process to dismiss underperforming teachers, including those teachers that were tenured, would improve their jobs as leaders.

A commonly held belief in the educational setting is that once a teacher earns tenure, they are guaranteed a job for life (Donn, Donn, Goldberg, & Kirby, 2014). While this is not the case, arguably the process of dismissing a teacher who has

earned tenure has become so difficult as to seem impossible and the process can seem daunting. Many states differ in what is required in order to dismiss a teacher that has acquired tenure status (Nixon et al., 2010). Chen (2018) supported a very clear and effective evaluation process having documentation necessary for accountability. These documents are paramount when a principal attempts to dismiss an ineffective teacher. A teacher that has union backing can challenge the decision fairly easily, so documents to support issues with the teacher are needed to back up the actions an administrator might want to take (Chen, 2018).

Goldhaber and Walch (2016) surmised there would continue to be issues with tenure even with reform in tenure laws if practices within schools did not change. They stated “tenure reforms will have little effect if principals are reluctant to dismiss marginal probationary teachers and may have a negative effect if potentially effective prospective teachers are deterred from entering the profession due to increased risk” (Procon, 2018, p. 13). Principals must be willing to go through the process in order for the system to improve. Clay (2015) added to this by surmising tenure is not the issue. Tenure is one of the benefits that draws quality applicants to the field of teaching, which is historically known as an underpaid and underappreciated career.

In Washington State, teachers are on a continuing contract after their first 4 years of teaching in a new district. After a teacher cycles onto continuing from a noncontinuing contract, principals go through an extensive process to recommend a teacher to be switched to a noncontinuing contract. This process can take years depending on the agreed upon factors negotiated between the district and union (Hardin, 2019).

Grauf (2015) researched barriers to dismissal in Missouri in his doctoral study. He pointed out that teachers should be given every opportunity to improve. They should be offered professional development, education, and every other chance to show improvement. Grauf surmised that if every opportunity was offered to a teacher and no improvement was shown, the teacher should then be dismissed.

Collective Bargaining. Another factor that can influence much of what happens with administrative decisions is the collective bargaining that takes place between the school system and the teacher organizations. Much like tenure can make a difference in what flexibility a principal has in the decision-making process, the agreements made between a school board and teacher unions through the process of collective bargaining are considered in good faith. School districts are expected to adhere to the agreements established during the process (Lovenheim & Willen, 2016).

States across the country have adopted laws acknowledging the requirement for school districts to allow teachers to work with educator unions. In Missouri, the right for schools to participate in collective bargaining is recognized under Article I, Section 29 of the Missouri Constitution (Missouri Const. art 29, revised 2015). In Washington, it is recognized by Washington Education Association (Washington Education Association, n.d.) and was founded in 1889. Like Missouri, Kansas offers a variety of options and also includes the right for schools to participate in collective bargaining (National Education Association, n.d.).

Merriam-Webster defines collective bargaining as the “negotiation between an employer and a labor union usually on wages, hours, and working conditions” (“Collective Bargaining”, 2020, para. 1). Collective bargaining increased the presence

of teacher unions in schools. Coulson (2010) discussed the impact teacher unions have on education, stating collective bargaining made teacher unions a powerful force for teachers in the 1960s and 1970s. In other research, the point was made that collective bargaining resulted in major improvement in the treatment of teachers in the educational system (Vachon & Ma, 2015).

Many states, even those not considered to be “union states” such as Missouri, used collective bargaining to make decisions that directly affected teacher compensation or work environment. Florida is another state not considered to be a union state but the state still encourages teachers to join the Florida Educator Association each year (Florida Educator Association, 2020). The Florida Educator’s Association is a labor union that helps protect the employees’ rights and working conditions.

Marianno and Strunk (2018) discussed how there were numerous decisions made during the collective bargaining process requiring agreement between school officials and union representatives. Important facets of school operations, including compensation for teachers as well as the daily operation of schools, were hashed out during these meetings. The collaboration took place with both parties playing an equal part in the decision-making process.

Robson et al. (2018) stated that prior to the 1960s benefits for teachers, including salary and duties, were decided by a meeting between teacher representatives and the administration or the school board. Robson further stated there were three main reasons unions were organized to speak for teachers. The first reason was the private sector unions had shown a lot of success in improving working

conditions for laborers. Continued low pay for teachers was the second reason. Robson et al. stated college educated teachers were making less than an hourly factory worker earned. The third reason was poor working conditions still existed for teachers despite the efforts of teachers to fight for them. Teachers were not guaranteed a lunch break. Many teachers were required to do duties that had nothing to do with teaching, and the rules for female teachers were still vastly different than their male counterparts (Robson et al., 2018).

Prosise and Himes (2021) stated collective bargaining was an agreement between a school district and a bargaining group that was supported by district attorneys and the law. It was in everyone's interest to come to an agreement in a timely manner that was acceptable to all parties. This was another way in which the influence of unions was shown. If a district made an agreement with a union representative that was not supported by administrators, the district could not go against that agreement. Shipma (2021) further stated that although a district was not mandated to enter into an agreement with unions through collective bargaining, it was an understanding that the goal behind participating in a conversation was to come to an agreement.

Coulson (2010) discussed effects of teacher unions on education and the impact of unions and collective bargaining. His research found collective bargaining helped teacher unions gain great influence over all aspects of education. Teachers' wages, teaching conditions, and insurance benefits, as well as influence over district programs were all influenced through this process (Coulson, 2010).

Robson et al. (2018) stated that the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 expanded the union's influence to an even wider scope in the schools. The union began to bargain for such items as student discipline, class size, teacher dismissals, and teacher evaluations. There have been many positive developments that have occurred for teachers since the inception of collective bargaining. In addition to the benefits mentioned above, collective bargaining improved overall working conditions, increased salary schedules, and decreased the number of discriminatory firing practices (Robson et.al., 2018).

Other research discussed the effects of collective bargaining on all public employees including the specific areas collective bargaining influences to create benefits for employees. Brunner and Ju (2019) stated the use of collective bargaining increases public employee wages at an average of 6% over those employees not represented by a union. Frandsen (2016) made the point that teacher unions assisted in increased wages, improved retirement benefits, and helped decrease class sizes for teachers. McNeal (2013) agreed that collective bargaining was advantageous for teachers in many ways, but could create an adversarial relationship between the teacher unions and the board of education-

Collective bargaining also had an effect on administrators. Ingle, Rutledge and Bishop (2011) discussed these effects, showing collective bargaining agreements could affect which teachers were dismissed when a reduction in force was needed. In many states including Washington, Missouri, Kansas, and Florida, negotiations require the last hired certificated educator would be the first to be released from contract in the event of a required reduction in staffing, and not the least effective

teacher (Northern et al., 2012). Agreements such as these that came out of collective bargaining could cause contentious relationships to form between teachers and administrators (Ingle et al., 2011). If a reduction in force was needed at a school and an administrator was required to go by seniority, this could potentially cause educators to feel their performance matters less than the number of years served at the school. However, the number of years taught by a teacher does not necessarily guarantee a better, more effective teacher. An administrator may be required to give up a teacher that does not have as much experience but has demonstrated a student-centered welcoming approach in their classroom. Using seniority as a determining factor for reduction in force eliminates the ability for a principal to use performance to facilitate the outcome.

As with many other aspects of teacher unions, collective bargaining also had a mix of support and opposition. Donn et al. (2014) wrote about the arguments on both sides of the equation, and reported that “overall the criticism is that the results of teacher collective bargaining generally sacrifice the educational needs of students to the desires of teacher unions to protect their members” (p. 496). The research further stated teacher unions and collective bargaining could be one of the main reasons there were issues with the educational system. Much like those that oppose tenure within the system, collective bargaining was considered by some to be detrimental to the educational system.

Donn et al. (2014) also presented the argument for those supporting collective bargaining for teachers. The argument was that collective bargaining was what unions used to create the agreements that made the system more equitable and provided for

due process for teachers. In most cases, through collective bargaining, a teacher was guaranteed an arbitrator through due process that made an impartial decision on issues with the teacher's job. Donn et al. discussed that the protections offered through due process could be quite substantial and elaborate.

Teacher Union Supporters

There are many positive attributes to teacher unions. The ultimate goal of teacher unions has always been to support and improve the conditions of the teaching profession (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020). Tucker, chief executive officer and president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, has studied the best education systems in the world. He discussed the role of teacher unions and the similarities between countries that have the highest student performance. All of the countries in the study also had strong teacher union influence (Tucker, 2012).

The idea of having an organization that will help protect the rights of workers and help improve working conditions is an amazing concept. Marchant, Mulvihill, and Martin, (2015) corroborated this view when they discussed the absolute need for teacher organizations support of teachers. Marchant et al. discussed how teaching was one of the very few professions where teachers are held responsible for the end product when they are given no control over what they have to work with – the students. Tanner (2013) discussed this, finding proponents of teacher organizations believed the attacks on tenure were about budgetary demands rather than educational improvement. Tanner further stated the attacks on teacher organizations were not only an attack on teachers, but on their professionalism as well (Tanner, 2013). Yet another proponent of teachers using the power of unionization was Scribner (2015)

when he discussed the fact that teachers that have the backing of teacher organizations have much more control when making curricular and pedagogical decisions with teaching.

The unions have helped increase wages, improved working environments, offered due process, and dictated specifics within the working day of the teacher. For example, one provision in legislation mandated a lunch period for teachers free of student responsibilities (Han, 2019, Tucker, 2012). Kahlenberg (2016) also argued for the necessity of tenure by stating it supplemented civil rights and labor laws in two ways. The first way was by making employers prove that termination was justified. The second way was tenure protected teachers from being fired for discriminatory reasons that did not necessarily fall under the category of race or gender. There was also the issue of experienced teachers who were working for a much less experienced principal. Ravitch (2007) wrote for AFT that teachers should be allowed the protection of a union against any type of firing that would not be considered fair or just.

It is widely known that one of the benefits of being a member of a teacher organization is the legal protection they can provide. There is a myth that the unions will vehemently defend any teacher member that is in jeopardy of losing their job. This is not always the case. Unions do not always protect teachers. Proponents of the teacher organizations make it clear not all cases are financially feasible to take on (Han, 2016). A lengthy court battle could be costly for both a district and the union. Antonucci (2015) wrote, “it is very rare for a teacher with tenure to be fired simply because he or she is not very good in the classroom” (para. 5).

A tenured teacher was dismissed more often for egregious choices such as “inappropriate contact with a student, intoxication at school, or excessive absences” (Antonucci, 2015, para. 5). Although the union provided legal protection for members, it was not going to take on a losing battle that was going to cost them hundreds of thousands of dollars if it was clear the teacher had been guilty of wrongdoing.

The added steps that the teacher unions have created through the use of tenure made it necessary for school districts to provide statutory grounds before terminating a teacher. No longer could administrators dismiss a teacher from their position without due cause. Black (2016) discussed the steps that were required to be taken before dismissing a teacher. To dismiss a tenured teacher, “states typically require a demonstrated record of incompetent teaching over a period of time” (Black, 2016, p. 89). A teacher must receive a written letter stating the noted deficiencies and then be given time to correct the items noted in the letter. If the items of deficiency were not met, the teacher “still must receive formal notice of the school’s intent to terminate and an opportunity to contest the determination of incompetence through administrative hearings and appeals” (Black, 2016, p. 89). In short, tenure required due process. Black also asserted that by requiring due process for teachers an administrator was restricted from firing a teacher for unsubstantiated reasons. Instead, a principal had to use logic, reason, and documentation (Black, 2016).

Goldhaber and Walch (2016) supported this idea through their discussion of tenure and teacher quality. The research stated that those people who supported teacher unions and tenure did so because “the due process provisions of tenure are an

important deterrent to unjust dismissals (Goldhaber & Walch, 2016, p. 9). The research also argued that getting rid of tenure would not fix the issue of bad teachers and that doing so may, in fact, make the educational reform process that much more complicated. The idea that teacher organizations protect bad teachers was referred to as a myth in one study. Han (2016) discussed that unions did not protect bad teachers, but rather assisted school districts in attracting quality teachers due to the higher pay negotiated by unions for teachers. Han examined teacher turnover in the case of voluntary and involuntary turnover rates. It was argued that most states had a probationary period of 3-5 years for teachers. During this time, principals were highly motivated to make certain they had a quality teacher, or they chose to dismiss the teacher before they earned tenure so the process was not so tedious (Han, 2016).

Black (2016) argued teacher unions and tenure were essential for teachers. He argued against the elimination of tenure protections for a variety of reasons. The main contention was eliminating tenure could lead to random dismissals and increased refusals for teachers to earn tenure. Black stated this in turn would cause a “further eroding of the existing and potential teaching workforce. At the very least, unreliable teacher dismissals would likely produce a new wave of litigation by teachers alleging that they had been denied due process” (Black, 2016, p. 92). Black continued on to surmise that if this occurred the number of quality applicants seeking teaching positions would decrease, which would compound the issue of maintaining effective teachers even more difficult.

Henrion (2016) also supported the idea that tenure is not the problem with the educational system. She surmised many of the issues within the educational system

are due to political and economic issues having nothing to do with tenure. There was already an inequality in our system for the students in underprivileged areas. Taking tenure away would make these schools even less desirable to a new teacher seeking a teaching position (Henrion, 2016).

Northern et al. (2012), compared the strength of unions across the states. In this research, supporters of teacher unions disputed all claims of those who opposed the unions. Northern et al.'s research stated proponents of teacher unions claimed the union's "power is greatly exaggerated, they are bulwarks of professionalism, that their opposition to misguided reform is warranted, and that they couldn't possibly account for achievement woes" (p. 8).

Although tenure had been blamed for many of the issues in education, Robertson (2015) stated there many aspects to a student receiving a quality education and no one factor could take credit or blame. Robertson also believed losing tenure would hurt many school districts. Robertson further stated tenure also served the important function of academic freedom. Teachers were able to do their job and make decisions about their career without fear that they would lose their job unjustly (Robertson, 2015).

Black (2016) discussed the issues tenure created for administrators, but also stated very specifically that there was

little hard evidence as to whether eliminating tenure will finally free schools to take the necessary steps to improve teaching or just make matters worse by creating additional workplace pressures that render the profession even less attractive to existing and potential teachers. (p. 79)

He made another point about the possible negative effects of eliminating tenure. Black stated for those that argued that tenure allowed for ineffective teachings, there was no concrete evidence that there was a direct correlation between tenure and ineffective teachers.

In Zirkel's (2010) research, he also declared that giving teachers tenure was not the reason ineffective teachers were not dismissed. He believed tenure simply forced administrators to use due process when attempting to dismiss a teacher. Moreover, Zirkel stated the real issue was the "lack of will among various players in the tenure process, including those who participate in making state law and in collective bargaining" (p. 76). In other words, if administrators would follow the requirements of due process, and legislators would create state laws that worked for our system, administrators would not have the issues they have with dismissing ineffective teachers.

Proponents of tenure and teacher unions argued that teacher unions were, indeed, proponents of educational reform. They stated that reforms have recently been made in much of the system. These reforms were supported by the two largest teacher organizations due to the positive changes they made with tenure and for the benefits for students (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010)

Teacher Union Opposition

One of the greatest criticisms of teacher unions is that they are truly a labor union more interested in the benefits of its members, rather than the well-being of students. Higginbottom (2019) discussed scenarios of teachers behaving unethically, and yet the principal felt helpless because of the union influence in the district. He

stated that although the teacher's behavior was unacceptable and harmful to students, the principal did not feel as though she could move towards dismissing the teacher.

Marianno (2015) supported the idea that the best interest of the student was not always the first priority of the teacher union. He stated that adversaries of teacher unions "are primarily occupied with securing additional benefits for their members, and that the interest of students are at best, a secondary concern" (Marianno, 2018, p. 18). Lathan (2011) supported this idea as well by supporting the idea that unions benefit people, but forgot they were dealing with students, learning, and the unique act of teaching. Because of this, opponents believed any changes to the educational system would threaten mandates put in place by the unions, putting the unions in direct conflict with educational reform.

Barnard (2019) wrote there were two detrimental mistakes unions made that adversely affected our students. The first was unions normally had contracts that included a seniority factor when firing teachers. These clauses in the contracts did not take into account teacher effectiveness and made it necessary to let go of a great teacher based on seniority. Another mistake Barnard pointed out the unions made was basing teacher pay on "experience and education level" (para. 4) rather than teacher effectiveness. Teachers were paid based on the number of college hours earned and how many years taught rather than on how well their students were doing in the classroom.

Yet another source stated that as unions gained ground and more members, they also garnered a lot of criticism. Robson et al. (2018) found some of the concerns expressed about unions were that they carried too much political influence. Ordway

(2019) mirrored this opinion when she discussed the immense influence teacher unions had on legislation and elections. Teacher unions lobbied political officials, which led critics to believe the unions carried too much weight in the political world. Pulliam (2019) discussed in his research that labor unions remain potent players in the world of politics with the millions of dollars they are able to use to support their cause. Ordway also stated teacher strikes caused harm to students due to the loss of instructional days; the additional steps required by the unions to dismiss teachers were cost prohibitive and took too much time for administrators. Ordway continued the union's "last in, first out" (p. 27) rule required administrators to consider seniority over teaching quality. When faced with budget cuts, many school districts have required administrators to nonrenew the last teacher hired. This teacher may be a shining star compared to a tenured teacher, but because they were the newest employee in the building, they have to be the first to go.

The opposition to unions continued in research conducted for an organization called The Center of the American Experiment in which teachers were polled about their opinions towards teacher unions. Wigfall (2018) wrote that even teachers agreed unions made it difficult for bad teachers to be fired. It referred to these type of teachers as "how are you still here?" teachers (Wigfall, 2018, para. 2). Wigfall stated that "62 percent of unionized teachers and 64 percent of non-unionized teachers" (para. 4) held the belief that unions made the process of firing teachers more difficult (Wigfall, 2018). Bala (2014) reinforced this idea when he discussed the state of education today. He held the opinion that all bad teachers should be fired. Those of us in the world of education know this idea is not practical, nor does it follow due

process. Bala believed this would fix many issues in education. Other opposition to teacher unions stems from the unions' involvement in the political arena. Henig, Lyon and Anzia (2019) stated the unions had a large political impact at the state and local level due to the influence they created. She stated the unions spent an enormous amount of money at these levels to influence who got elected to the local and state boards of education. If the union could influence an election at this level, it was essentially "helping to elect the very people they bargain with" (Henig et al., 2019, p. 55). The research made the point that teacher unions would continue spending ample time and money in these areas to influence decisions made directly affecting teachers.

Berman (2016) discussed the political aspect of the teacher unions and how it affected the money spent by the unions in his research. Berman stated the unions' strong support of the status quo was why teacher organizations continued to be heavily involved in politics. Berman found the unions had spent hundreds of millions of dollars in lobbying for over 40 years, with most of the money going toward groups that supported their beliefs.

Griffith and McDougal (2016) agreed with this assessment when they discussed why bad teachers rarely got fired. They surmised the process behind firing an underperforming teacher for many school principals was "complicated and cumbersome" (Griffith & McDougal, 2016, p. 4). Tenure was blamed for many of these issues. They further stated teacher unions would do almost anything to continue to protect what was considered the status quo, regardless if it ended up protecting bad teachers (Griffith & McDougal, 2016).

Another issue that could occur due to tenure is what was referred to as the “dance of the lemons” (Dunn, 2017, p. 7). This practice occurred when an underperforming tenured teacher was passed from one building to another within a district instead of going through the process to dismiss that teacher. Dunn stated that many times these teachers ended up in schools that were less affluent than the one from which they came (Dunn, 2017). Principals in these buildings were not given the option to refuse these teachers. Chen (2018) discussed this issue regarding the number of teachers dismissed for poor performance from different states. Chen elaborated on the very low percentage of low-performing teachers that were dismissed in comparison to all teacher dismissals. The percentage was as low as .1% in some states. She also referred to the practice of the “dance of lemons” by many schools instead of attempting to dismiss a tenured teacher that was underperforming (Chen, 2018).

Northern et al. (2012) published the results of a study done by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute that discussed the strengths of teacher unions across the United States. The research rated each state in a number of areas as well as discussing the support and opposition to teacher unions. Those that opposed teacher unions stated they did so due to unions “using their powerful grip on education politics and policy to great effect, [and unions] bear primary responsibility for blocking states’ efforts” (Northern et al., 2012, p. 8) that would help reform education. The critics also stated “unions generally succeed at preserving teacher job security and other interests, and do so at the expense of improved opportunities for kids” (Northern et al., p. 8). Black (2016) also discussed the opposition to teacher union involvement in politics. Black

stated that teacher unions manipulated the educational system in order to receive unreasonable benefits for teachers.

Critics also pointed out the influence the unions had in other areas outside of the political arena. Antonucci (2015) stated teacher unions had a far-reaching influence in a number of national arenas. “They have partnerships with large corporations on many levels: sponsorships of union events, discount arrangements, and credit cards as part of member benefits packages” (Antonucci, 2015, p. 33). The fact that the teacher unions had a hold in organizations this influential supported the idea that the unions reach had become much too deep and lacked the focus it needed to positively influence education.

The court case of *Independence National Education Association v. Independence School District* (2006) was a court case in which three different employee groups sued the school district for coming up with a new Collaborative Team Policy that no longer required the district to meet and bargain individually with these groups as they had previously. Instead the district agreed to meet with one large collaborative group at one time to discuss the issues of all the groups. This review went as far as to state that the process the unions used to negotiate with schools in support of teachers ignored students’ needs. Teacher organizations supported collective bargaining, which in turn encouraged teachers to strike if an agreement could not be reached. When teachers strike, which is illegal in some states, including Missouri, pursuant to Missouri Revised Statute 105.530, it took away what should be a given right to every student by the Missouri Constitution, “access to a free public education” (Missouri Const. art 29, revised 2015, p.15). Teacher strikes are legal in

34 states according to the National Council of Teacher Quality (Nittler & Gerber 2018). Teachers who work in nonstriking states must reach a negotiated agreement and if one cannot be reached, teachers are expected to be at work while negotiations occur (Nittler, 2019). The substantial cost of any litigation that may be tied to a teacher strike could be detrimental to students and a school district as well. The law review stated collective bargaining could potentially be devastating to a school district. Money used in the process could be money used to directly benefit students. School supplies, facility improvements, and needed equipment could be purchased with those same funds (Donn et al., 2014).

In further reading of *Independence National Education Association v. Independence School District* (2006), the review stated collective bargaining could also be bad for teachers because it took away the ability for teachers to make their own decisions about policies that affected them or their teaching and restricted the use of their own professional judgment. The review stated collective bargaining was centered around “control and conformity.”

Independence National Education Association v. Independence School District (2006) stated collective bargaining was bad for students, teachers, and education. The review pointed out that using collective bargaining created an adversarial relationship between teachers and management causing tension, which, in turn, could affect teaching and students. An adversarial relationship between the teachers and the administration does not help to create a climate conducive of trust and collaboration. The review continued with the belief that by using collective

bargaining a school district moved away from putting students first and instead followed the demands of the union.

In a monumental court case discussed in an article written by Edwards (2014), Judge Rolf M. Treu ruled, in *Vergara v. California* (Tabron & Irby 2015), tenure violated the state's constitution. His ruling stated, "Tenure and other job protections make it harder to fire teachers and therefore effectively work to keep bad ones in the classroom" (Edwards, 2014, p. 37). The *Vergara v. California* ruling directly supported the argument that teacher organizations, and the use of tenure and collective bargaining, made it difficult to dismiss an underperforming teacher. This law case was a great example of how tenure laws have become so restrictive as to damage the educational system.

California's tenure laws are some of the strictest in the country. Teachers in California can receive tenure "after less than two years on the job, and principals are required to lay off the least experienced teachers first – no matter which ones are the best" (Edwards, 2014, p. 37). Opponents of tenure used this court case as another example of a system that worked to protect its members rather than working to protect students. White-Smith (2002) studied perceptions of tenure and discussed critics' reasons for opposing tenure. White-Smith contended that keeping tenure was questioned by different stakeholders, including politicians and parents. These stakeholders did not see the need for tenure and believed that it kept ineffective teachers in the classroom (White-Smith, 2002).

Black (2016) discussed in a California law review that there were several factors prohibiting administrators from removing ineffective teachers from the

classroom. One of these factors was tenure. Tenure and other aspects of the educational system, such as seniority, made it difficult for administrators to address ineffective teachers. Black continued to state, “the procedural process of removing even the most grossly ineffective teachers from the classroom is extremely difficult and costly” (p. 89).

The Missouri State Board Association (Goldammer, 2020) also supported the idea that unions did not always do what was best for students. The organization stated there were times that unions pushed initiatives that were not in the best interest of the students. Instead, the initiative was what was best to raise wages and increase benefits for teachers. The association stated this is “the primary responsibility of the unions that represent these employees. Unions should focus on their members. It is not the union’s responsibility to protect the quality of education provided to the district’s students” (Goldammer, 2020, p. 4). The job of the board was to protect the students, not the union.

In a law review by Donn et al. (2014), they reinforced the idea that the unions supported the teachers, not the students. The research argued the fact that by keeping collective bargaining and tenure, the educational system did not “reward quality or punish incompetence” (p. 496) but that it rewarded seniority instead. Sims (2015) also supported this opinion viewing teachers unions as special interest entities that failed to support student needs in the classroom. She discussed the issues with collective bargaining and how it put teachers and administrators in adversarial relationships. In a study by Dandoy (2012), data show that administrators identified

two things as barriers to dismissal. The strong presence of a union and teacher tenure were what kept poor teachers from being dismissed.

Black (2016) discussed in his California law review that due process must be given to a tenured teacher and that such teachers cannot be released from their contract without the school making a case against the teacher. These methods took a lot of time and effort on the part of the administrator. Black claimed that this process required the reasons for dismissal be limited and made it difficult for a district to acquire proper evidence of an ineffective teacher (Black, 2016).

Another reason there is opposition to teacher organizations or unions is the undue pressure they placed on school boards and school administrations. The Missouri State Board Association stated

political pressure is the only tool unions have to encourage school districts to enter into agreements. This holds true for some states, including Missouri, where the law does not require districts to consult mediators and arbitrators when agreement is not reached. (Goldammer, 2020, p. 3)

The information stated that in order to pressure board members on an issue, unions would attempt to publicize the debate in order to get support. This strategy also pressured board members to make the decision supported by the union. Other methods of pressure could include unions supporting their members to picket, go on strike, or file a grievance.

Whether opposed or supportive of tenure, studies showed that members of both parties believed that making changes to the tenure laws, rather than eliminating them altogether, would improve the system. Dianis (2006) polled superintendents and

principals on whether they believed the elimination of tenure would improve the quality of teaching. The results of the poll showed 43% of superintendents believed it would be very effective, where only 29% of principals agreed it would be very effective (Dianis, 2006, p. 88).

States Positions Regarding Teacher Organizations

In doing research for this topic, it was important to understand the perception of the strength of teacher organizations. Research was found comparing union strength in all states. Some of the strongest union presence existed in Hawaii, Oregon, and Montana (Northern et al., 2012). The phrase “Missouri is not a union state” was quoted to the researcher several times during the process. Research showed that every state had some influence from teacher organizations, but some states had much stronger influence than others. In a state-by-state comparison done by Northern et al. (2012), the influence of teacher organizations in Missouri ranked overall 38th out of the 51 states in the influence teacher organizations had on the state based on five criteria: resources and membership, involvement in politics, scope of bargaining, state policies, and perceived influence. So, in essence, Missouri and every other state could be called a “union state.” There were different levels of involvement and influence in each state. This same study showed that because Missouri was rated 38th, it was considered weak in teacher union strength. Missouri laws permitted collective bargaining, and yet the level in which the union seemed to be involved in Missouri schools was low enough to be considered weak on the researcher’s leveled scale of strongest to weakest (Northern et al., 2012).

In states that have “right-to-work” laws, a company cannot require that the employees join the union and pay dues to be a part of it. States with strong union representation fought these laws because they wanted their members to join their union and pay the dues. Another factor that influenced the perception of the strength of teacher organizations in Missouri was the fact that it was not a right-to-work state. Marianno and Strunk (2018) stated that Missouri passed legislation making it “right-to-work” (p. 20). Missouri residents petitioned for the ruling to be put to a vote. The legislation was voted down in April of 2018, making history by being the first state to vote down the “right-to-work” initiative after the legislation passed in the House.

Missouri State Board Association’s website stated that Missouri should consider itself lucky (Goldammer, 2020). Although it was allowed by law to participate in collective bargaining, the Missouri Supreme Court did not make it mandatory. Missouri was not required by any law to enter into a contract with teacher unions (Goldammer, 2020). Unlike other states where the law had definite guidelines that school boards were required to follow, Missouri’s law did not. This did not mean that Missouri schools should not enter into agreements with teacher organizations or unions just because law did not require it. It was clear that it was in everyone’s best interest that a common ground be found where teachers felt supported and a school board felt like it was doing what was in the best interest of its students.

Although Missouri did not rank as one of the strongest in union strength, research supported the significant influence of teacher organizations in every state. A study done by political scientists who ranked the top 40 most influential interests in the states found that teacher organizations “most consistently find that state affiliates

of the National Education Association vied for the first spot” (Henig et al., 2019, p. 55). With this kind of ranking, it was understandable that teacher organizations would hold an immense amount of political power.

Inferences for Forthcoming Study

The study of literature was clear only in that the role of teacher organizations had evolved greatly over the years since their inception. Whitley’s (2021) study showed the progression of power NEA possessed in education through the decades, including the influence in policy, standards, and politics. Although the initial motivation was to fight for better working conditions for teachers, in more recent years controversy seemed to follow as the organizations became more involved through collective bargaining and tenure laws. In more recent years there has been a battle to reform tenure, but there were parties that had very different ideas on how that should be done. The debate ranged from completely removing tenure from the educational system to making tenure much stronger for teachers. Research (Goldhaber & Walch, 2016) indicated it was difficult for parties on both ends of the debate to find a middle ground. The inference for this study showed the experiences of the principal going through the process of dismissing an underperforming teacher. It examined the principal’s perception of challenges throughout the process and ascertained what principals believe to be barriers in the process. The study specifically examined the experience the principal has with teacher organizations when dismissing an underperforming teacher.

Summary

There is controversy within the educational system in regard to teacher unions, tenure, and collective bargaining (Goldhaber & Walch, 2016). The influence the unions have had on the educational system has grown and changed over the years. Some states, for example, moved from a tenure system to a comprehensive rotation to ensure teachers rotate onto a comprehensive evaluation every few years (Washington Education Association, n.d.). It is apparent that there are arguments for both sides in regard to the impact that teacher organizations have in schools. The chapter presented a history on how teacher unions have developed and changed over time, and how unions have shifted their purpose to support teachers even at the cost of quality instruction for students. Previous research presented in the review of literature shows a gap of information, specifically in the position Missouri takes with exiting ineffective teachers when they are supported by teacher unions.

In Chapter Three the researcher will further present the purpose of the study, as well as state the research questions used in the interviews. The chapter will cover the assumptions of the study and the participants used. The research setting is discussed as well as the design used and the data analysis. Chapter Four will provide an analysis of the results and Chapter Five will provide an overview of the research, review and verify the findings, and serve as a conclusion to the research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Teacher organizations have had a large part in shaping the way in which teachers' contracts have been developed over the years. According to NEA, "our approach is to raise the voice and vision of educators and build strong partnerships with parents, students, and other community stakeholders." Local affiliates of NEA have won contract language around issues including smaller class sizes, less testing, and community schools (Holcomb, 2021, para. 2).

These organizations, to increase wages and improve working conditions for teachers, used collective bargaining. Teacher organizations also created tenure for teachers in some states such as Missouri, according to the Missouri NEA chapter. Chapter Three will provide the purpose of this study, understanding the experiences of the principal with teacher organizations when dismissing an underperforming teacher. The research questions used will be introduced as well as the participants that were chosen for the study. The researcher will discuss the setting and design, the instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis. An analysis of principals' perceptions regarding union influences was completed using a qualitative phenomenological study of principals ranging in years of experience. In addition, principals were chosen who represented different communities including rural and urban settings. This design was used in order to discern whether there were common perceptions among principals regarding the influence a teacher union has on a principal's decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand what experiences principals had when dismissing an underperforming teacher. The experience was generally defined as those aspects of the process that principals felt hindered them from moving forward with a dismissal of an underperforming teacher. The study strove to discover if the principal perceived teacher organizations, in their support of teacher tenure, to create barriers to dismissal for principals dismissing underperforming teachers or if that was a misconception held by administration. Principals of varying lengths of service in Southwest Missouri in secondary locations were interviewed in order to discover if a principal's perception changed based on the number of years of service and the changes with teacher reform over the years.

Research Questions

The following central research question and subquestions guided the study:
What is the principal's experience with teacher organizations and tenure laws when dismissing an underperforming teacher?

- a. What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as barriers from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?
- b. What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as a benefit from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?
- c. What experience has the principal had with changes in the focus of teacher organizations in schools during the principal's tenure?

Participants and Sampling Size

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that participants should not be chosen at random, but rather with intention to further the study and understanding of the research questions. The participants for this study were chosen with the range of experience to better understand any differences that have occurred with perceptions of the teacher union influence over principal's decisions to dismiss underperforming teachers.

Ten participants who matched criteria were chosen from Missouri secondary schools. Two participants from each category ranging in years of experience from 1-5 years, 5-10 years, 10-15 years, 15-20 years and 20-25 years was interviewed. The researcher was able to interview each participant and then find themes within their answers to draw common experiences among the participants. This method was chosen due to the narrative format that allowed participants to freely articulate their experience with teacher organizations.

This method was most suitable because of the unique experiences that were possible for each participant in their career. It allowed for data collection with questions that could be expanded upon or clarified if necessary. The data collection for this study allowed the researcher to ascertain if principals' years of experience and interaction with teacher organizations, in combination with dismissing teachers, had changed the experience for administrators throughout the years.

Data were collected through interviews with principals from secondary schools from Missouri. The range of experience was chosen to help illuminate any differences in the experiences the principals had with teacher organizations as they

grew and changed. The researcher asked qualifying questions of the participants such as demographics as well as questions that gathered information regarding perceptions of the influence of teacher organizations regarding decisions to dismissing underperforming teachers. All data were gathered by interviewing each participant with the same set of questions.

The research focused on principals in secondary schools in Missouri with a range of years of experience that had gone through the process of dismissing an underperforming teacher. A letter was sent to principals of middle and high school in Missouri that asked for participation in the study (see Appendix A). The letter to the participants included a link allowing principal participants to identify how many years they had been principal and if they had participated in a process to try and exit a teacher from his or her school (see Appendix B). Lastly, the link asked participants if they would be willing to be interviewed to determine if unions had an influence on dismissing an underperforming teacher. If participants did not qualify, they were thanked for their time and the screen closed. If principals selected yes, an opportunity was given for them to enter their contact information so an interview could be scheduled. Once participants were selected to be interviewed, they were each provided with an informed consent that outlined the study (see Appendix C).

Research Setting

It is the researcher's ethical obligation to make certain each subject is protected from harm. This was accomplished in this study by providing confidentiality to participants. A thorough process was followed to avoid bias or negative connotation when developing the interview questions. Once developed, the

questions were used consistently throughout the use of the study. In addition, participants could pass on specific interview questions if they chose not to answer.

For the purpose of this study, the completion of the process of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) through Southwest Baptist University was required. Once the university IRB process was completed and approved, a research request was provided to each district in Missouri. After each district approved the research request, the researcher reached out to each secondary principal requesting participation (see Appendix A).

Research Design

This is a phenomenological qualitative study based on the perceptions administrators had toward any influence teacher organizations may have on the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. A phenomenological study was used in order to allow the participants to focus on their experience with teacher unions. One of the benefits of using a phenomenological study for this research was the unstructured way in which it could be conducted. The researcher was able to interview each participant and then find themes within their answers to draw common experience among the participants. This method was chosen due to the narrative format that allowed participants to freely articulate their experience with teacher organizations.

The range of experience was chosen to help illuminate any differences in the experiences the principals had with teacher organizations as they grew and changed. Questions gained demographic and qualifying questions of the participants as well as questions that gathered information regarding perceptions of the influence of teacher

organizations regarding decisions to dismiss underperforming teachers. All data was gathered by interviewing each candidate with the same set of questions.

Instrumentation

Qualitative phenomenological research uses the researcher as the key instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers can conduct interviews using open-ended questions to gain the perspective of the participant on the phenomenon being studied. It is important in a phenomenological study that the researcher remains unbiased during the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated one way to do this is for the researcher to focus on the participants' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences rather than his or her own. Another way the researcher addressed bias and validity was by triangulating the data. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded, and member checking was done on the information gathered. Studies suggest using a variety of methods for analyzing interviews including transcriptions and coding as two components of triangulations (Creswell, 2018).

Interview Process

The data were collected in the summer of 2021. Chosen principals were asked to participate in an interview process to gain insight into research questions. If a principal chose not to participate, another subject was randomly chosen, using the original list of interested participants. Only principals in secondary schools in Missouri were interviewed.

Participants were interviewed in their own buildings, allowing for a more comfortable setting in which they could share their views. This is also the setting in which the participants dealt with challenges with underperforming teachers. Due to

COVID restrictions, participants were given the option to participate via Zoom for interviews. The researcher sat one-on-one with each participant, going through the questions and following up with clarifying questions when needed.

After answers were collected and analyzed, an in-depth assimilation of the information was written. The questions used during the interviews were tested for reliability and validity by using a group of experts to preview the questions to ascertain whether the questions asked what they needed to ask and that they were consistent in what they were asking. The experts also looked for any bias that may have existed within the questions.

It is also important for the researcher to explain the reflexivity of the research, or rather, how she positioned herself in the research. For this study, the researcher found she was curious, after years in administration in the secondary setting in public schools, about what influenced a principal to either keep or dismiss an ineffective teacher. The researcher witnessed several cases in which a teacher had three-ring binders of negative documentation. Instead of the teacher being dismissed, the teacher's contract was renewed or the teacher was shifted to a different school within the district.

Explication of the Data

Each participant was interviewed using the interview questions (see Appendix D). All interviews were recorded and transcribed upon completion. Transcripts were used to search for themes and common experiences among participants. The researcher synthesized the information gathered from the various principals with

varied levels of experience. Participants' specific remarks were included to validate the findings.

According to Groenewald (2004), there are several steps that should be taken during the explication of the data in phenomenological studies. The first step included bracketing the information gathered from participants. This step was done to make certain the information collected was free from the researcher's own presuppositions. It was meant to create a clear sense of what each participant had experienced.

The second step in this process was to delineate units of meaning (Groenewald, 2004). During this step the researcher extracted themes or concepts from the participants' interviews. It was important during this step that the information was recorded exactly as intended. In doing so, the researcher did not share an opinion that might support or oppose the shared concept.

The next step the researcher took was to form themes from the participants' interview transcripts. During this step the researcher deliberately revisited the interview information to compare against a list of significant topics that emerged during the interview process. This information was used to determine themes that occurred among the participants.

After the first three steps had been accomplished, the researcher summarized each interview to validate and modify all information gathered. Groenewald (2004) made the point that each person's experiences were unique based upon their past, position at the time of the experience, and personal viewpoints. The researcher kept this in mind while trying to understand the relation to the other participants'

comments. The researcher concluded this step by returning to the participants to verify the meaning behind each answer was captured correctly.

The last step suggested by Groenewald (2004) was to combine all interviews to develop general and unique themes from the information gathered. Although some of the answers were unique to each individual, participants shared clusters of information that were identified from themes and common ideas. This step also focused on presenting the participants' information in language that was appropriate for scientific research.

The researcher used three different methods of data gathering commonly used in qualitative research. The first method the researcher used was unstructured interviews in which participants were given open-ended questions to gain their perspective (see Appendix D). Participants were allowed to expand on any answers.

Bracketing was also used for data analysis. Bracketing is a method in which the researcher sets aside her own experiences to better understand the experiences of the participants. The researcher looked at the information provided by the participants in a fresh and new light (Creswell and Poth, 2018). By using this method, the researcher attempted to view the information provided as though it were completely new information.

Memoing was another method used for data analysis. This method used the researcher's field notes that were taken based on exactly what the researcher "hears, sees, experiences and thinks" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 48) during the course of the interviews. The memoing was broken down into four types of field notes that included Observational, Theoretical, Methodological, and Analytical. This allowed

the researcher to return to her notes and pull pertinent information related directly to the interview questions.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of whether teacher organizations influence principals' decisions to dismiss underperforming teachers. Participants within Missouri were interviewed using a set of identical questions (see Appendix D). Once information was gathered from the participants, the interviews were transcribed, coded, and member checked in an effort to ensure validity and reliability of the instruments used. The qualitative data were collected and analyzed to determine the influence a union has on a principal's decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. Chapter Four will present the data collected through participant interviews. Chapter Five will present the research questions used for the interviews, data findings, implications for the field of education, and the significance of the findings for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to understand what experiences principals had when dismissing an underperforming teacher. The study consisted of 10 interviews from participants ranging in years of experience: 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 21-25 years. Each participant was asked the same series of questions with an opportunity to clarify any answers if needed. This chapter presents the results from those interviews, themes that were discovered in the responses, and the district and teacher organization policies that helped influence decisions made by administrators.

The framework for this study was structured around two of the leadership frameworks of Bolman and Deal (2008). The political frame theory was the first of the two frameworks. This framework revolved around dealing with those entities in a position of power, conflict and influence. Administrators that are in a situation where they must decide to dismiss an underperforming teacher many times must deal with representatives from a teacher organization, in addition to district policies and protocols.

The second leadership framework from Bolman and Deal (2008) that guided this research was the human resource frame. This framework revolved around understanding the needs of others within the organization. An administrator must carefully balance the needs of the building, the students, and the teacher in question,

as well as representatives from teacher organizations. At the forefront of every decision must be the idea that decisions are made based on what is best for kids.

Chapter Four is organized by participants and data analysis, including themes found among participants, as well as district and teacher organization policies that may influence any decisions made by principals. The research was based on the central question and subquestions: What is the principal's experience with teacher organizations and tenure laws when dismissing an underperforming teacher?

- a. What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as barriers from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?
- b. What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as a benefit from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?
- c. What experience has the principal had with changes in the focus of teacher organizations in schools during the principal's tenure?

Each participant must have possessed the required years of experience as well as have dismissed an underperforming teacher.

Participants

Participants were found by obtaining contact information from DESE for secondary principals in Missouri. The list of contact information was then used to send out a qualifying survey that asked principals for years of experience and if they had experience with dismissing an underperforming teacher. Using those results, participants were divided into categories by years of experience. Participants were

then chosen at random within their categories to participant in the interview process for the study. All participants were coded to protect confidentiality. The demographic information for participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant Data	Role	Years as a School Leader	Gender
Participant 1 (P1)	Principal	3	Male
Participant 2 (P2)	Principal	4	Male
Participant 3 (P3)	Principal	6	Female
Participant 4 (P4)	Principal	10	Male
Participant 5 (P5)	Principal	12	Male
Participant 6 (P6)	Principal	14	Male
Participant 7 (P7)	Principal	16	Male
Participant 8 (P8)	Principal	16	Male
Participant 9 (P9)	Principal	22	Female
Participant 10 (P10)	Principal	25	Male

Verification/Trustworthiness

A phenomenological qualitative approach was used for this research. Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed different strategies that can be used for validation in qualitative research. This researcher used member checking, peer review, and triangulation in order to provide verification and trustworthiness of the data. Creswell and Poth recommended using at least two validation strategies to help validate the findings.

Member checking. Member checking was done after all interviews were completed. Interviews were recorded using Zoom, and were uploaded into Otter.ai to create transcripts. Each transcript was shared with the corresponding participant for review through email. Each participant then reviewed transcripts for any clarification needed. There were no changes requested by any participant after transcript reviews.

Peer review. Peer review was created by reviewing the research topic and questions with several colleagues with a range of experience in educational leadership. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated the importance of having colleagues who can give honest feedback and be a devil’s advocate with the research questions. This researcher was blessed to be surrounded by colleagues who were willing to fill this role and gave clear and honest feedback on any changes they felt needed to be made. After collaborating with several colleagues, a couple of changes were made to research questions to make their meanings clearer.

Triangulation. Triangulation was created in the research through the 10 participant interviews, district policies related to dismissing underperforming teachers, and policies and protocols from teacher organizations related to dismissing teachers. Making use of these multiple data sources allowed the researcher to corroborate information from the participant interviews.

Data Analysis

Using a phenomenological qualitative theory, the researcher first bracketed the information gathered from all participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) described the need for the researcher to set aside any personal biases or preconceived ideas about the research before beginning. The researcher did not disclose to participants any personal opinions she might have had about the research topic during the process of the interviews. The researcher was diligent to let the participants answer each question fully before trying to clarify any answers. If further information was needed, the researcher asked, “Can you tell me more about that?”

Creswell and Poth (2018) described the next step in a phenomenological study as the researcher listing all relevant information, or in this case, common terms, in a format where all terms are given equal value. Interviews were recorded and then uploaded into Otter.ai to create transcripts of the interview. The benefit of using Otter.ai was the system tracked the number of times words were used repeatedly, therefore helping to create themes and commonalities between interviews. The researcher then read each transcript, making notes and highlighting those parts of the interview that revealed participants' perceptions of influence when making the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. Common key words were counted and tracked using the spreadsheet in Table 2.

Table 2*Top Five Most Commonly Used Vocabulary*

Vocab	#	Vocab	#	Vocab	#	Vocab	#
P1		P2		P3		P4	
process	20	year	13	teacher	23	teacher	31
teacher	18	teacher	10	concern	15	year	19
dismissing	11	conversations	9	observations	7	conversation	15
year	11	process	6	happened	7	issue	12
opportunity	7	president	6	plan	6	imp. plan	10
P5		P6		P7		P8	
growth	15	teacher	34	year	15	teacher	28
process	14	improve	14	district	9	profession	14
situation	12	imp. plan	14	feel	9	process	13
continue	10	inst. coach	9	NEA	7	district	11
step	9	observations	6	teacher	7	meeting	11
P9		P10					
knowing	17	teacher eval	48				
dismissing	7	teacher	41				
tenured	7	principal	15				
year	7	process	13				
teacher	6	observed	11				

Note. imp.plan = improvement plant; inst. coach = instructional coach; teacher eval = teacher evaluation; and NEA = National Educators Association. Each participant was assigned a code correlating to their years of experience. Example – P1 and P2 were 0-5 years of experience.

The combination of 10 interviews created 2 hours, 40 minutes, and 10 seconds of recorded interviews. This translated to 41 pages of written transcripts. Field notes were also taken during each interview for follow-up questions and clarification. The length of each interview, as well as the translated number of written transcript pages, for each participant can be seen in Table 3.

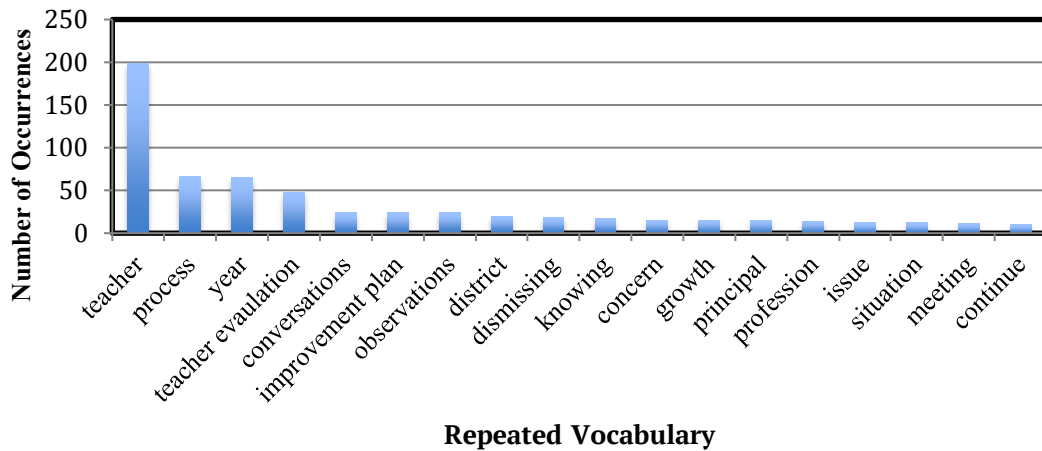
Table 3*Interview and Transcript Length*

Participant	Interview Length Min:Sec	Transcript Pages
P1	9:06	3
P2	10:57	4
P3	11:25	3.5
P4	31:03	8
P5	10:12	3.5
P6	13:57	4
P7	15:33	4
P8	16:51	4.1
P9	12:58	3.2
P10	16:43	4.5

The third step in the data analysis was to create clusters of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed the researcher to combine statements from participants into meaning units and eliminate repetitive statements. This was done by taking the most used vocabulary of each participant, combining the total number of times the word was mentioned among all participants, and creating a graph of the top five. These terms are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Repetitive Interview Vocabulary



Note: This figure demonstrates the frequency of vocabulary used by participants in order from most to least used.

The researcher took the top five most frequent vocabulary words to begin a search for themes and comparisons among interviews. The recorded interviews were listened to multiple times, transcripts were reread, and themes were highlighted as they were found among participants. The next step was to scan all transcripts for unrelated and repetitive terms. These were marked through as found by the researcher.

Participant interviews, district policies, and teacher organization policies and protocols were used to create data triangulation. District policies were compared against each other to find similarities. Teacher organization policies were also scrutinized and used for comparison against participant statements and district policies.

Coding Procedures and Theme Development

The next step of data analysis was a review of the transcripts where preliminary meaning units were found by the researcher. These units were used to develop themes based around each research question. The themes were developed as the data were analyzed and matched up with Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource and political leadership theories. Each research question was viewed from the perspective of what was best for the teacher and what outside forces had influence over the situation. Information gathered from Otter.ai identifying the repeated use of words was used to discern themes and commonalities among the participants. The researcher used Otter.ai to track the repetition of vocabulary and recorded that information on a spreadsheet to discern which words were used most and those that had the least repetition. The researcher then went back through the recorded interviews several times, making note of repeated themes found among participant interviews. Once data were narrowed, the researcher then used that data to create themes. The researcher used the data sources of participant interviews, notes taken during the interviews, and participant statements to create themes. District policies, teacher organization policies and protocols, and information obtained from interviews were cross-referenced with policies to confirm accuracy of statements. The themes can be found below in Table 4.

Table 4*Record of Coded Information*

Coded words/phrases	Record of occurrence	Theme
conversations	24	Coalitions and Conflict
district	20	
dismissing	18	
principal	15	
issue	12	
happened	7	
NEA	6	
plan	6	
president	6	
teacher	199	Relationships and Growth
year	65	
teacher evaluation	48	
improvement plan	24	
knowing	17	
concern	15	
growth	15	
continue	10	
opportunity	7	
process	66	Motivation & Agendas
observations	24	
profession	14	
situation	12	
meeting	11	
instructional coach	9	
step	9	
tenured	7	

Table 4 lists the 26 coded words and phrases that were used to create themes and categories for data analysis. The themes were created using the theoretical human resource and political frameworks of Bolman and Deal (2008). The first theme created was from the political frame, centered around the ideas of coalitions and conflicts. The words chosen that showed connection to this theme were (a) conversations, (b) district, (c) dismissing, (d) principal, (e) issue, (f) happened, (g) NEA, (h) plan, and (i) president. The second theme derived from Bolman and Deal's

human resource frame was relationships and growth. There were nine key words found that connected to this theme. They were (a) teacher, (b) year, (c) teacher evaluation, (d) improvement plan, (e) knowing, (f) concern, (g) growth, (h) continue, and (i) opportunity. The third theme, motivation and agendas, had eight key words and phrases connected with it. These words and phrases included (a) process, (b) observations, (c) profession, (d) situation, (e) meeting, (f) instructional coach, (g) step, and (h) tenured.

Analysis of Theme 1: Coalitions and Conflict

The first theme identified from transcripts was coalitions and conflict. This theme was developed from the coded words found in the transcripts combined with the ideas behind Bolman and Deal's (2008) political leadership framework. The idea behind this framework is leaders must be cognizant of the conflicts created by different agendas and the entities and people in power (Bolman and Deal, 2008). There were nine key words associated with this theme. These words included (a) conversations, (b) district, (c) dismissing, (d) principal, (e) issue, (f) happened, (g) NEA, (h) plan, and (i) president, as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Record of Code Information: Coalitions and Conflict

Coded words/phrases	Record of occurrence	Theme
conversations	24	Coalitions and Conflict
district	20	
dismissing	18	
principal	15	
issue	12	
happened	7	
NEA	6	
plan	6	
president	6	

The words in Table 5 identify the first major theme of coalitions and conflict. This theme was based on the political leadership theory from Bolman and Deal (2008). This theory revolves around the idea that a leader within an organization must learn to deal with those entities that are a source of power or influence and the conflict that they can create. The key words in this group were used to identify this major theme.

This theme was identified in several ways through interviews. Participant 9 (P9) stated,

I had somebody early in my career, with one of the teacher organizations there in town, specifically NEA, give me advice. His comment to me was, as long as you follow the process, and every procedure, I can't stop you. But if you miss a step along the way, I'll catch it and we will stop you.

Most participants agreed with the viewpoint that if an administrator was following all procedures and protocols as required, representatives from teacher organizations were a benefit to the process and supportive of what an administrator was trying to do.

Participant 4 stated,

I think that people should have representation or have the right to because you want to make sure you're not being, you know, leveraged into a position you don't want to be in. And unfortunately, you know, you're going to have administrators out there who really don't know what they're doing, or they've never done it before.

The idea that teacher organizations influence principals' decisions to dismiss underperforming teachers was only supported in the sense that participants believed these organizations were important to have to advocate for teachers and to force administrators to follow procedures. Having to follow procedures when dismissing teachers was considered a positive attribute of teacher organizations by all participants.

All participants agreed that the presence of teacher organizations was important. Most agreed that in the majority of instances, the teacher organization representative perceived the situation in the same manner as the principal. Participant 2 stated,

Things continued to not improve to a level that was acceptable. That individual reached out to the president of the NEA, which she was a member of. That individual, the president of NEA and I continued to have

conversations, continued to document behavior, and I was fortunate that the NEA president saw things the way I was seeing them.

Although most participants had experienced positive interactions when dealing with representatives of teacher organizations, there were three participants that did not always experience support from the teacher organization representatives. Participant 4 discussed the fact that, at times, it felt as though a representative from a teacher organization needed training on how to serve as an advocate for a teacher. He felt that if there was more training and exposure to the district procedures they were going to be working with, then collaborating in a situation where a teacher's performance is questioned would be easier on everyone. He stated,

I do think there's a level of training needed for union representation on what it truly means to advocate. I think that oftentimes, especially when that person comes out of the teaching ranks, their definition of advocacy, and what true advocacy is, is way skewed.

Participant 3 also had some experience with the teacher organizations that were not positive. Instead of being an advocate for teachers, the experience felt more like the teacher organization representative was on the defense and waiting for a conflict.

Participant 3 stated,

I think the teacher union organization is geared for defense and not on assisting teachers to get better. I wonder if they could be working in collaboration to help teachers get better. An administrator could say, hey, here's the struggle area and the teacher could apply to get support in that area.

I wish our teacher union was more positive in their interactions and proactive instead of you can't do this or you can't do that.

The attitude from this participant was similar to Participant 4 in that their interaction with teacher unions was a contentious experience. It felt more like them against us rather than two entities working to improve the skill set of a teacher.

The third participant, Participant 8, also experienced a somewhat negative incident with a teacher organization representative. P8 talked about a lack of trust between the administration and the representative. The meeting between administration, the teacher organization representative, and teacher took place and all evidence of how the teacher was underperforming was presented. As far as administration was concerned, the evidence was clear that the teacher needed to improve in several areas. Even though the evidence was clear and well-documented, the teacher organization representative did not support the district. Participant 8 stated,

The agreement going into the meeting was the representative understood the issues with the teacher. The representative did not support the teacher in their best interest knowing the problems that were occurring. If the representative was going to let the situation go to the next level, the teacher was going to be in greater danger of losing their certification. The representative did not counsel the teacher in the way it was agreed upon, so there was a lack of trust from that point on.

Analysis of Theme 2: Relationships and Growth

The theme of relationships and growth came about based on the human resource leadership framework theory of Bolman and Deal (2008). This theory is

based on the idea that people are the most important part of any organization. The needs of the individuals should be served and recognized. When a principal is going through the process of trying to make the decision whether to dismiss an underperforming teacher, there are a lot of human needs in question. The words associated with this theme were (a) teacher, (b) year, (c) teacher evaluation, (d) improvement plan, (e) knowing, (f) concern, (g) growth, (h) continue, and (i) opportunity. The frequency of use of these terms among participants can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6

Record of Coded Information: Relationships and Growth

Coded words/phrases	Record of occurrence	Theme
teacher	199	Relationships and Growth
year	65	
teacher evaluation	48	
improvement plan	24	
knowing	17	
concern	15	
growth	15	
continue	10	
opportunity	7	

The term that was most used in all interviews was “*teacher*”. The human resource theory of Bolman and Deal (2008) discusses people should be the most important part of any organization. Teachers are the most important part of any school. When principals must make the decision whether to dismiss an underperforming teacher, there are a lot of human needs that must be met. Every participant interviewed agreed, unless there was an egregious incident with a teacher, it was worth putting in the time needed to try and coach a teacher up in whatever area

was deficient. Participant 8 stated, “The culture and climate here is very much that we want teachers to be successful and will give every teacher the opportunity to do so.” Participant 6 echoed this attitude when he stated that “if there is something that needs improvement, there is an opportunity for the teacher to improve that specific area before going to an improvement plan.” Participant 4 echoed this opinion when he stated, “Anything you can do to support them and help them out is always going to be the goal.”

This attitude was repeated with all participants. Every principal interviewed felt there should be an opportunity for improvement before moving forward with any other actions. The terms “*year*”, “*teacher evaluation*”, “*improvement plan*”, “*knowing*”, “*concern*”, “*growth*”, “*continue*” and “*opportunity*” were all associated with this theme and this belief was held by the participants.

When trying to make the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher, the principals felt most teachers should be given at least a year to improve the skill sets identified that needed growth. Principals would continue to document improvements, or lack thereof, through teacher evaluations and needed to be present enough in a classroom to really know the area of concerns. Participant 4 stated, “If a teacher is showing me that they’re trying to grow, that they’re listening and willing to take some criticism, I don’t want the hassle of putting a teacher on an improvement plan if I don’t have to.”

Principals also discussed the fact that it was difficult to go through the process of a performance plan and offering the teacher opportunity to grow without a teacher feeling like the process was personal. In many situations, teachers would become

bitter or defensive, which created issues during the process. Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource leadership theory emphasizes the importance of making employees feel valued. The process of attempting to allow the opportunity of growth is difficult for everyone involved.

Analysis of Theme 3: Motivation and Agendas

The theme of motivation and agendas was from the ideas behind Bolman and Deal's (2008) political leadership framework. When a principal must make the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher there are a lot of agendas that can be in play as well as motivations that may not be understood. It is important that a principal understands the motivation behind the actions of not only the teacher, but also of the teacher organization representative that may be working with that teacher. The words associated with this theme are (a) process, (b) observations, (c) profession, (d) situation, (e) meeting, (f) instructional coach, (g) step, and (h) tenured. The frequency of use of these terms can be found in Table 7.

Table 7

Record of Coded Information: Motivation and Agendas

Coded words/phrases	Record of occurrence	Theme
process	66	Motivation and Agendas
observations	24	
profession	14	
situation	12	
meeting	11	
instructional coach	9	
step	9	
tenured	7	

Table 7 identifies the major theme of motivation and agendas by connecting the terms used by participants that connect to the ideas of coalitions, conflicts,

bargaining, and negotiations. These coded words were used to identify this major theme. There were eight words identified in the theme of motivation and agendas.

Many of the participants spoke about the process of dismissing a teacher and the time that it took to work with a teacher to either improve a needed skill set, or continue through the process of dismissal. All participants spoke to the desire to help a teacher improve rather than dismiss a teacher. Unless a teacher committed an egregious mistake, each principal hoped improvements could be made. Participant 4 (P4) stated, "I truly always want to keep those processes with everybody's best interests at heart, including the teacher." Participant 6 (P6) also stated, "As we go through the process, if there was something that needed improvement, I tried to give an opportunity to improve that teacher before we officially went to an improvement plan."

All participants also discussed the importance of numerous teacher observations that needed to be done during the process. Consistently documenting issues or problems so there was a paper trail is an important part of putting a teacher on an improvement plan, and then, if needed, dismissing that teacher. None of the participants believed putting a teacher on an improvement plan or having to discuss a possible dismissal should ever be a surprise to a teacher. The participants believed there should be observations, meetings, and conversations with teachers so they were very clear what was happening. Participant 2 (P2) supported this idea when he stated, "Early on when it began, it was just some conversations and corrections, but when those same things continued to happen we got a little more formal and followed up each conversation with an email." Another participant talked about the importance of

copious documentation so that there was no question as to what was going on during the process. Participant 3 (P3) stated,

I'd have a conversation with the teacher to see if I could coach them up informally. Continue on with that pattern until you can see progress. If you don't see progress within a timely manner, set another plan in place, continue observations, and then set a formal plan in writing that states what steps the teacher will take to get better within a specified timeline.

There was also a sense from the participants that it did not matter whether a teacher was probationary or tenured if they were not doing what was best for kids. Several of the participants took jobs in a new building only to find some tenured teachers that should not have been teaching. Although the process to dismiss a tenured teacher can take longer than the process for a probationary teacher, all participants agreed that the status of a teacher would not keep them from moving forward with a dismissal if needed. Participant 5 (P5) echoed this sentiment well when he stated,

When comparing a probationary versus a tenured teacher, you're going to want to make sure that you have the data and the evidence in front of you that records any conversations you've had with them. The probationary process would be a little bit easier because you have more flexibility, but we're going to continue to work with our employees to try to help them grow. But at the end of the day, if they are not meeting the needs of the students, we're going to take the steps to terminate and bring someone in that will meet the needs.

Participant 4 also talked about the differences in dismissing a probationary teacher versus a tenured teacher and how the process might be more arduous with a tenured teacher. He stated, “If I don’t feel like improvement is being taken seriously, I would transfer to an improvement plan, just like you would with a probationary teacher.” Although all participants felt going through the process of dismissing a tenured teacher took more time and documentation, tenured status would not prevent them from moving forward with the process.

Summary

Chapter Four presented participant information, including years of experience and the gender of each participant. The chapter detailed how participants were chosen and the interview process. The researcher used member checking, peer review, and triangulation to provide verification and trustworthiness of the data. Peer review was also used to confirm the validity of the data.

Information centered around three themes created from the coding of words and phrases from participant interviews were shared. These themes were created as the researcher analyzed the data. The themes matched up with the human resource and political leadership theories of Bolman and Deal (2008). Participant statements that supported these themes were shared along with principals’ perceptions of the influence of teacher organizations when dismissing underperforming teachers.

Chapter Five presents the researcher’s opinions on the findings of the research. It also presents a summary of the problem and the limitations of the study. The summary of methods is also explained. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research and a summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand what experiences principals had when dismissing an underperforming teacher. Participants for this study were principals in Missouri from secondary schools who qualified by years of experience and dismissing an underperforming teacher. There were 10 participants for the study, two each with the years of experience: 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20 and 21-25. The researcher first sent out a qualifying survey asking participants to confirm they had dismissed an underperforming teacher. From this group of candidates, participants were chosen at random within their group of experience.

The framework for this study was based on the human resource and political leadership frames from Bolman and Deal (2008). The theories offered a framework for the researcher to better understand the conflict, the political influences, and the human needs associated with this study. In a situation where there is a possibility of someone losing their job or their livelihood, different agendas can come into play as well as human emotion and needs. The two frameworks, in combination with the themes found in the participants' interviews, were used to create the themes used for data analysis.

Chapter Five includes summary of the findings, interpretation of the data analysis, limitations of the study, and interpretations of findings that were not anticipated. This chapter also includes professional implications for the field of

education, as well as recommendations for future research. A list of references used as well as an appendices of documents can be found following this chapter.

Research Questions

The research question and subquestions guided the research for this study:
What is the principal's experience with teacher organizations and tenure laws when dismissing an underperforming teacher?

- a. What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as barriers from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?
- b. What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as a benefit from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?
- c. What experience has the principal had with changes in the focus of teacher organizations in schools during the principal's tenure?

These questions were addressed in the interview protocol through a series of seven questions that were asked of each participant. The participants were given open-ended questions regarding the principal's perception of the influence of teacher organizations when dismissing an underperforming teacher. All participants were asked the same questions with a follow-up question of, "Can you tell me more about that?" if clarity was needed.

Limitations

Chalmers and Cowdell (2021) stated that all phenomenological research should "provide in depth insights and understanding of real-world issues" (p. 47). A

qualitative study was best suited for this research because of the narrative nature of the interviews, but with all research there are limitations. The limitations for this study were as follows.

There were five limitations identified in this study. The first was that there was a possible issue with participants giving true responses. This was addressed by presenting to each participant that their identity would be kept in strict confidence. The only information that would be shared would be demographical information including years of service and gender. The second limitation was possible bias participants could have held towards teacher organizations or the tenure system. A definition of bias was given to each participant along with a request to withdraw from the study if they held bias towards any part of the topic. The third possible limitation was the chance of participant dropout. This was addressed by having alternative participants selected at random from information gathered from DESE of other possible participants with the same range of years of experience. The fourth limitation found in this literature was the researcher was limited to the responses provided by each participant. Due to the narrative nature of this phenomenological study, answers could have varied greatly depending on the participant. The researcher addressed this limitation by asking clarifying questions when necessary or when more detail was needed. The fifth and last limitation in this research was the fact that participants may not have been completely representative of the population of all principals in Missouri. The researcher addressed this by using information from DESE that allowed principals with a wide range of years of experience as principal to be selected as participants.

Summary of Methods

The participants in this study were principals of secondary schools in Missouri. Each principal was required to have nonrenewed an underperforming teacher from their contract. Additional requirements included a specific number of years of experience in their position. There were two principals from each of the following categories: 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 21-25-years' experience. Principals were sent a qualifying Google survey that asked two questions only. The first question asked if they were a principal in a secondary school in Missouri and the second question asked if they had nonrenewed a teacher. If participants answered yes to both of these questions, they were placed in a pool from which to pick random participants within their years of experience category.

The researcher completed interviews with all 10 participants, using the same seven questions for each interview. All interviews were recorded and then uploaded to Otter.ai for transcript creation. The researcher analyzed each transcript, multiple times, took extensive notes, and used color-coding to highlight any reoccurring terms or phrases used by participants. The researcher transferred repeated terms and phrases to a spreadsheet organized by coded participants. Each term and phrase repetition was counted and detailed in the spreadsheet. The researcher could then begin to discern which terms and phrases were used most and create themes based on the most used. Commonalities among terms and phrases were grouped to create three themes based on the political and human resource frameworks of Bolman and Deal (2008). Triangulation was used to increase the validity of the data. The researcher

compared the interviews against district policies as well as policies written for the teacher organizations that gave required practices to use when dismissing an underperforming teacher.

Summary of Findings

The researcher established themes around principals' perceptions of the influence of teacher organizations on a principal's decision to dismiss underperforming teachers. This was completed through a series of interviews with secondary principals from Missouri. Repetition of key words and phrases was used in order to establish these themes. There were overlapping commonalities found among principals' perceptions, as can be found when addressing the research questions that formed the foundation of this research.

Research Question. The main research question for this study asked, "What is the principal's experience with teacher organizations when dismissing an underperforming teacher?" Interviews were conducted and the data were analyzed. The researcher found that all of the answers could be tied back to the main research question. The three themes - coalitions and conflict, relationships and growth, and motivation and agendas - developed from the coding of the data were also all associated with this question.

The idea behind this research came from one of the first leadership positions held by the researcher. The researcher was in a leadership role in an inner-city school when she had a conversation with the principal at the time about how difficult it was to dismiss an underperforming teacher. The principal reached up into his cabinet and pulled out a large three-ring binder. The binder was full of performance improvement

plans and write-ups on one employee. The principal then pulled down two other binders that were much the same on two more teachers. The principal talked about the concept of “passing the trash,” a concept in which a poor teacher is passed from school to school within a district because the district was not able to dismiss the teacher. To someone just starting out in a leadership role, the whole idea of this concept seemed unreasonable and unacceptable. It was difficult to understand why a teacher would be allowed to continue teaching if they were not doing what was best for kids.

It became clear during the interviews that all participants believed there was an influence from teacher organizations when making the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. The difference in what was learned from the interviews versus the experience the researcher had as a young administrator with her first principal varied greatly. All participants believed teacher organizations played an important role in the process of dismissing a teacher.

The experience with teacher organizations differed slightly due to some of the differences in districts and the years of experience worked as a principal. The two principals that worked at least 20 years stated the process had changed over the years, but both participants felt the change was for the better. The process for dismissing a teacher guaranteed due process and had become more structured through the involvement of teacher organizations. Although not every participant had experienced a positive experience with teacher organizations over the years, without fail, every participant believed there was a definite need for teachers to have the additional support through the organization.

Research Subquestion a. The first subquestion asked, “What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as barriers from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?” The researcher analyzed the information given by participants to find that much of the data gathered were associated with this question. The data related to this question were also found in the themes of coalitions and conflict, relationships and growth, and motivation and agendas.

The experience participants related they found to be one of the biggest barriers from teacher organizations when trying to dismiss an underperforming teacher was a lack of time. The number of observations required, meetings, and paperwork could be arduous and time-consuming tasks. Many principals found the process to be time-consuming and difficult to complete in a timely manner. In addition, in relation to the theme of coalitions and conflict and relationships and growth, principals found that no matter how hard they tried, going through the process of placing a teacher on a performance improvement plan and then moving forward from there to recommending dismissal affected the relationship with the teacher and could cause conflicts. Dismissing a teacher becomes personal rather than simply professional no matter how hard an administrator attempted to separate the professional from the personal. Someone losing a job is personal.

Another barrier mentioned by several of the participants was the relationship the administrator had with the representative from the teacher organization. If the relationship was a positive one, there was mutual respect, and everyone worked from the perspective of doing what was right for kids, the process moved forward

successfully. In addition, if the administrator was following protocol and working the process as dictated by procedures, the process moved forward successfully. The barrier presented itself when there was not a good relationship between principal and teacher organization representative. This was found to be the case in more than one principal's experience, making the process of dismissing a teacher difficult.

Participants perceived a lack of experience from teacher organization representatives as another barrier to dismissing an underperforming teacher. Several participants mentioned they felt there needed to be a better training program for those individuals who were chosen to be a representative of a teacher organization. Although most experiences with teacher organizations had been positive and supportive, there were a few instances in which the representative for the teacher organization was perceived as confrontational and unprofessional, even when it was obvious the teacher was performing at a subpar level.

Research Subquestion b. The second subquestion in the research asked, "What experience has the principal had that might be perceived as a benefit from teacher organizations to an administrator who needs to dismiss an underperforming teacher?" This question could be associated with all three themes of coalitions and conflict, relationships and growth, and motivation and agendas. The data analyzed found that principals perceived teacher organizations to be helpful and beneficial in most instances. Principals felt that if they did their job properly, followed protocol, and did their best to support the teacher in growing, they would be supported by the teacher organization. Unless a teacher committed an egregious act that required immediate dismissal, the process behind dismissing a teacher was long and involved.

Principals perceived the teacher organizations were a benefit in the sense that if they had taken all required steps, and followed proper procedures, representatives from teacher organizations became allies in the process.

Aligning with the themes of coalitions and conflict and motivation and agendas, principals discussed the fact that most representatives from the teacher organizations with which they had worked wanted the same thing principals wanted. They wanted effective, high-performing teachers in the classroom. Participants found that if they performed their due diligence, offered the teacher opportunities to improve, provided clear communication on exactly what was needed, and followed up with a performance improvement plan if needed, they would be supported in their decision. There were only two participants who mentioned they were not supported in their decision to move forward with recommending to dismiss an underperforming teacher. In both instances, the principals felt the representative was not advocating for what was best for the students or the building.

Research Subquestion c. The third research subquestion asked, “What experience has the principal had with changes in the focus of teacher organizations in schools during the principal’s tenure?” The data related to this question were found in the themes of coalitions and conflict, relationships and growth, and motivation and agendas. Principals interviewed who had up to 15 years of experience stated they hadn’t noticed much of a change in the expectation of teacher organizations throughout the years. Participants that were interviewed with over 15 years of experience did state there were noticeable changes in the procedures that occurred

within their school district from the time they started their administrative career to current day practices.

The most noticeable changes that occurred were how teacher observations took place and the expectation of data gathered during an observation. When they started their career, a specific number of walk-throughs was required for each teacher, as well as a specific amount of time spent in each classroom. Through negotiations with the teacher organizations, a pre-walk-through meeting, an observation, and a post-walk-through meeting was required with each teacher, for each observation. The requirements have changed over the years, due in some part to the creation of an online observation form and the realization that new teachers needed more observations than a teacher that had been in the classroom for years.

Discussion

The need for tenure in the school system and the influence it has among administrators has been long debated in the world of education. There is an argument that states tenure is essential in schools and needed to protect our teachers (Toloudis, 2019). On the other side of the issue is the group that believes tenure allows poor teachers to remain in schools to the detriment of our students (Marianno & Strunk, 2018). It is clear from the literature that over the years, teacher organizations have continued to grow in influence in school districts across the state (Kahlenberg & Greene, 2012).

This study arose from the question of whether teacher organizations influenced a principal's decision when trying to dismiss an underperforming teacher. The researcher wanted to know if principals perceived an influence, and if so, was the

influence a barrier to dismissal or beneficial in the process? The framework of the study was based on Bolman and Deal's (2008) leadership theories, specifically the human resource and political frameworks.

Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource leadership theory was an important framework for the study in the sense that it is essential to understand the needs of an employee and the level of job satisfaction when faced with the decision of possibly dismissing a teacher. It is an administrator's job to try to coach a teacher up and to help a teacher be the best they can be at their job. If there is a skill set that is missing or deficient, it is part of the leadership role to find professional development opportunities for that teacher to improve in that area.

If training opportunities and professional development are offered and a teacher does not improve, the administrator's job would be to start the process of a performance improvement plan with a teacher. The human resource frame comes into play in this instance as well due to the fact that a performance improvement plan can be the first step to dismissal for a teacher (Antonucci, 2017). Teachers that are placed on a performance improvement plan can view the process in such a way that changes their attitude for the worse. Placing a teacher on a performance improvement plan is a formal process and therefore a difficult task for an administrator to make a teacher understand that the process is meant to help them improve their performance (Chen, 2018).

The political frame of Bolman and Deal's (2008) leadership theories is also an important framework for this study. The political frame centers around different individuals or groups that may have different interests or agendas, which could then

lead to conflict. Depending on a person's opinion on the role of teacher organizations within schools, or the belief they hold as to the importance of tenure, administrators and the representatives of teacher organizations could hold very different agendas (Barnard, 2019). It is important for a principal to keep this in mind when dealing with representatives of the teacher organizations.

The analysis of the data gathered from interviews made it clear that most of the participants had a positive and supportive experience with representatives from teacher organizations. There were only two instances in which participants' perceptions were negative. One participant believed the representative he worked with needed training to understand what it meant to serve in the role as a representative. Another participant's perception of his negative experience was that the representative from the teacher organization was more interested in making certain that the teacher kept his job than he was in listening to the evidence that proved the teacher was underperforming in several areas.

The biggest revelation for the researcher in this study was the finding that most participants appreciated and welcomed the presence of representatives from teacher organizations when there were issues with teachers. Several participants mentioned that they felt the presence of yet another person that could sit and go through the data gathered about the teacher with the teacher helped to solidify the point that there were some areas of need in their performance. The "principal is out to get me" attitude was taken out of the equation because there was another person that was completely separate from the school supporting the administrator's view of the situation (Ravitch, 2007).

All participants also agreed that the onus was on the principal to gather numerous data points and documentation that clearly stated deficiencies in the teacher's performance. The principals that participated in this research also agreed that dismissing a teacher, with the exception of an egregious error, was not an overnight process. The process should include adequate time and ample opportunities for professional development given for a teacher to make improvement.

This study has contributed to the existing understanding in the educational field by adding to the knowledge of a principal's perception of teacher organizations on the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. The participants in this study all believed there was a need for teacher organizations and the due process they allowed teachers. With the exception of two separate instances over the course of many years of experience, they also believed the presence of a teacher organization representative during the process of dismissing a teacher gave the principals' decisions credibility. All believed that if they did their job with fidelity, and had the best interests of students in mind when making decisions, the presence of a representative from a teacher organization was a benefit to the process. Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource and political frameworks served as a solid foundation in trying to understand the needs of all parties involved in the process as well as the different agendas that needed to be considered to avoid possible conflict.

Educational Implications

The results of this study are important to understand the perception of teacher organizations' influence on a principal's decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. There is a lot of research that can be found regarding opinions on tenure in

the school systems. There is also research that discusses what principals perceive as barriers to dismissal (Grauf, 2015), but there was little research to be found that discussed the principal's perception of the process. With tenure reform continuing to be debated among educators, the perception of the principal and how it affected their job performance were important to understand.

After doing research for this study and finding so much information dealing with those that opposed tenure, and being in administration for several years as a principal, it was surprising to discover that all participants believed that the existence and involvement of teacher organizations were essential for teachers. It was also surprising to discover that all participants believed, for the most part, the involvement of a representative from a teacher organization was more helpful than not when going through the steps to dismiss a teacher.

Many opinions in the research talked about tenure being considered a job for life for teachers and something that made dismissing a teacher much more difficult (Wigfall, 2018). When discussing this with participants of this study, they wholeheartedly disagreed. The common consensus was that tenure could make the process a little lengthier at times, but it did not guarantee a teacher continued employment if they were not performing their job effectively. Participants also agreed that as long as a principal was following the steps of the process and meticulously documenting observations and discussions, any teacher that was consistently underperforming could be dismissed from their contract.

Yet another implication of this study was the attitude the principals held toward the teacher organization representatives themselves. In some of the research,

the relationship between administrators and teacher organizations was many times referred to as contentious (McNeal, 2013). The participants for this study had a different experience with their teacher organization representative. Several of the participants discussed the fact that they had a relationship with their representative that was one of mutual respect and open communication. In most cases, after reading through the documentation gathered by the administrator as well as discussing the issues that were occurring, the representative supported the administrator's decision and helped convince the teacher that the current situation was not the best fit for them.

Although trying to fire a tenured teacher can be costly (Black, 2016), most participants shared that the process did not normally extend beyond putting a teacher on a performance improvement plan. With the exception of two examples provided by participants, all teachers that had been placed on a performance improvement plan and had not been successful had chosen to resign rather than to have the district officially dismiss them. By doing this, the teachers in these scenarios would be able to go elsewhere to try to find a different teaching position without having the blemish on their record.

The most powerful implication of this study for the researcher was the opinion of all participants that whether a teacher was tenured or probationary, the process of dismissing an underperforming teacher fell to the principal doing their job with fidelity. The influence of the teacher organization was also given little importance among participants. They were appreciative of the presence for the most part, but even if a representative for a teacher organization was not supportive of a principal's

decision, it was still up to the principal to gather data, document observations, and communicate clearly expectations to either grow the teacher or dismiss them from their contract.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher used 10 participants for this study. Each participant had to meet the qualifications of a certain number of years of experience, as well as having gone through the process of dismissing an underperforming teacher. Participants also had to be a principal of a secondary public school in the state of Missouri. There were two participants chosen from each category of 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 21-25 years of experience. Future research could consider a nationwide study comparing principals' perceptions in states that were considered to be heavily influenced by teacher organizations, in comparison to states that were considered "nonunion". It would be interesting to investigate the perceptions of principals in states that had a strong union presence.

Another area of research that could be considered would be principals' perceptions of what they considered to be barriers to teacher dismissal. This study explored primarily tenure and the teacher organizations influence. Future research could go further into what principals perceived as formative barriers in the process of dismissing a teacher.

Yet another area of interest for future research could be a study that explored the role of a representative of teacher organizations when supporting teachers through the process of a dismissal. More than one participant in this study mentioned they felt representatives of teacher organizations should be more knowledgeable of what is

expected of teachers in a school district. It was also mentioned that there should be training for these same representatives considering their role in working with principals.

Summary

This study researched the perception of the influence of teacher organizations on a principal's decision when dismissing underperforming teachers. The theoretical framework that served as a foundation for the research was derived from Bolman and Deal's (2008) leadership framework theories, the political and human resource frames. Both of these theories served as a framework for this research due to the intricacies involved around a principal understanding the needs of the employee and the different agendas that are involved in the process of dismissing a teacher.

Understanding principals' perceptions of the influence of teacher organizations when making the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher fills a gap in research in the sense that the principal is the person who must recommend dismissal to the board. It is important to the field of education to understand if principals perceived the teacher organizations to negatively affect this process or possibly be a benefit to a principal and teacher during the process.

The research for this study showed that the participants in this study believed there was a role for teacher organizations and their representation in the process of making the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. The participants felt the presence of a teacher organization representative during this process allowed due process for the teacher. Most participants felt that the presence of representation also

supported them in their decision as long as they had done their due diligence in providing support and clear communication to the teacher in question.

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Appendix A

Letter Requesting Participation

Dear Principal,

My name is Kimberly Yeary and I am asking for your participation in a study regarding any influence the teacher unions may have on a principal when making the decision to dismiss an underperforming teacher. I am very interested in your opinion and I would be humbled and grateful if you choose to participate in the study.

The study will consist of a short interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. Your answers will help further the understanding of a principal's perception of the process when dismissing underperforming teachers.

Participation in the study will be completely confidential. The link provided below allows for qualifying information and gives you an opportunity to enter your contact information if you so choose.

Google Form Link

With Respect,

Kimberly Yeary

Appendix B

Participant Link Requesting Qualifying Information

Google Link

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1NNqrKxhBeFkY_tWDuE3gXCDrxIbuPMNBjvfc1IyzRNM/edit

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me a little about yourself professionally, including years of experience as a principal.
2. When you placed a teacher on a performance plan, can you tell me about the process?
3. When you dismissed an underperforming teacher, can you tell me about the process?
4. Can you explain the process of dismissing a probationary teacher versus a tenured teacher?
5. Were there any steps in the process that were more challenging than others?
6. Was there anything that prevented you from moving forward with dismissing an underperforming teacher?
7. Is there anything you would change about the process of dismissing an underperforming teacher?