

2020

Improving Classroom Management and Teacher Retention: A Needs Assessment

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Original Publication Citation

Stefaniak, J., Reynolds, J. L., & Luo, T. (2020). Improving classroom management and teacher retention: A needs assessment. In J. Stefaniak (Ed.), *Cases on Learning Design and Human Performance Technology* (pp. 201-226). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-0054-5.ch011>

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Chapter 11

Improving Classroom Management and Teacher Retention: A Needs Assessment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case explores how a needs assessment was conducted at a middle school experiencing high rates of teacher turnover. Pamela Frost, an experienced instructional designer, was assigned to assess the situation and identify opportunities to improve professional development opportunities for the teachers. As a part of a needs assessment, Pamela gathered data to address needs pertaining to classroom management challenges, teacher attrition rates, and establishing relations with the local community. This case explores how Pamela gathered data and triangulated her findings to determine what interventions were needed.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-0054-5.ch011

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Pamela Frost, an experienced teacher of 22 years, was not quite sure where to start when walking into Miller Middle School. She had recently been hired to lead programming initiatives for the professional development of the Miller Middle School's teachers. The school located in an urban city had been experiencing a record number of turnover amongst its teachers, averaging 47% every year for the past 10 years.

Miller Middle School is located in a metropolitan city and is made up of 800 students (48% female, 52% male), 40 certified teachers, one principal, three assistant principals (one for each grade level). Additional support staff includes 2 guidance counselors, 2 literacy coaches, 2 math coaches, a media specialist, a school psychologist, 1 part-time speech pathologist, 1 school nurse, and 25 non-certified staff including teacher assistants, cafeteria workers, and custodians/bus drivers.

The student body demographics are 40% Caucasian, 40% Hispanic, 15% African-American, 4% mixed race, and 1% Asian. A total of 70% of the student body receive free or reduced lunch at Miller Middle School. The percentage of proficient students with regard to standardized testing is alarmingly low (Table 1). Sadly, these numbers are not far from the rest of the state. On average, that are 15 students per day who serve an in-school suspension.

During her first week, Pamela met with Bryson Jackson, the school's principal. Bryson explained to Pamela that the school board was asking each school in the district to appoint a teacher who would be responsible for leading professional development programming that was customized to meet the needs of the teachers. The school district was still requiring teachers to participate in mandatory professional development activities, but they were charging schools with developing new programming efforts. The goal was to have teachers participating in 50% district-led initiatives and 50% customized initiatives.

Table 1. Percentage of proficient students in accordance with state standards

	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
Math	41%	29%	29%
Reading	53%	45%	58%

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Pamela had spent the first two weeks in her new position reviewing school and district policies and reviewing the previous professional development opportunities that had been made available by the district. Before proposing what modules should be eliminated, revised, or created, Pamela knew that it was in her best interests to conduct a needs assessment to fully understand the needs of the teachers in Miller Middle School. With an annual turnover rate of 47%, Pamela wanted to better understand what was causing teachers to leave the school, and whether the professional development efforts that she was now responsible for could eliminate the high turnover rate.

During her meeting with Bryson Jackson, Pamela explained to him that she thought it was important for her to develop a better understanding of the unique needs of the school by conducting a needs assessment. She wanted to learn more about the teachers and the students to help her identify professional development opportunities that would be perceived as valuable by the teachers. A teacher with an advanced degree in instructional design and technology, Pamela felt confident that should develop lessons and workshops to train teachers on a variety of technology integration strategies and applications. What she was not quite sure of was whether these types of interventions would really help address the challenges occurring at the school.

SETTING THE STAGE

After meeting with the principal, Bryson Jackson, on several occasions to discuss her new role within Miller Middle School, Pamela met with the administrative team consisting of Bryson and his three Assistant Principals, John Sven (6th grade), Matthew Palmer (7th grade), and Sheri Flax (8th grade). All three assistant principals had significant experience teaching middle school grades and had been with Miller Middle School since 2008. Each was responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations for the individual grade levels and coordinating with the administrative team in regard to improving teacher retention and strategic planning.

Pamela had called a meeting with the administrative team to identify the specific needs that they wanted her to prioritize for her first year in her new position. While Pamela had some ideas of what she thought they should address, she wanted to be mindful of the fact that the administrative team had been at Miller Middle School for a long time and were more familiar with day-to-day operations, policies, and challenges faced by the teachers.

Bryson opened up the conversation, “It’s plain and simple. Teachers would be more inclined to stay if they didn’t have so many headaches in the classroom. Newly graduated teachers accept positions at our school and realize after the first three months that this is not the environment they fantasized about in college.”

Sheri added, “The challenge is that we have such a hard time holding onto good teachers. When we recruit new teachers out of college, we don’t have many senior teachers that we can assign to them as mentors. I don’t think we’re providing sufficient support to them. I don’t think that any of them have been trained to deal with the magnitude of disciplinary issues in the classroom. There is so much disruption that they spend most of their time trying to diffuse confrontations and student interruptions, that they don’t get to spend enough time on teaching content.”

Pamela shook her head in disbelief. During her orientation, Sheri had given her a tour of the school. During that time, they sat and observed several classrooms in session. Pamela experienced, first-hand, the challenges that the teachers were encountering in the classrooms. “How are these classroom disruptions being communicated to the students’ parents?” she asked.

Bryson shared, “Any time there is a disruption with a student in the class, the teacher is asked to write a report that summarizes the incident. This is then filed with our office and placed in the student’s file. The teacher then notifies the student’s parents through our online School Portal. The portal is where parents can access notes from teachers, view their child’s progress, and any homework that has been posted. There are several functions on the portal where parents can communicate with the teachers directly, set up meetings, if needed.

A big concern of ours is that many of the parents are not accessing the portal. When we notify them that their son or daughter is being suspended, the few that do reply are more concerned with who is going to watch them during work hours. Because we’ve had such a high number of suspensions, we’ve had to create “in-school suspensions” to address this issue as well as try to prevent the students from missing too much school.”

Pamela asked, “How do you think any of the current professional development opportunities, offered by the district are helping your teachers manage these challenges in the classroom?”

“They’re not,” retorted John and Matthew in unison. Matthew continued, “We used to hold professional development workshops on designated P.D. days identified by the district. These were typically early release days for the students and our teachers would participate in training to collect their CEUs. We were responsible for keeping attendance logs and reporting to the district office on a quarterly basis.

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Recently, the district has tried to offer some opportunities like online courses so that teachers were not limited to the early release days. We are faced with two challenges. First, there are now so many opportunities for teachers to earn CEUs that it's unclear what is required and what is optional. Every month, the district seems to add additional "required" modules in addition to the bunch that the teachers are already completing.

The second issue is that the teachers keep reporting frustration with how to keep track of the CEUs they are earning. If they complete modules online, they are expected to submit a completion report through the district's portal. This isn't tracked for them. If they participate in an early release day workshop, we have to maintain written logs of attendance. If they attend a professional development program outside of the district, they have to report that to the district office electronically and by paper. It has become unclear in recent years what is considered a 'CEU opportunity.' If I remember correctly, our teachers were required to complete a combination of 50 modules and workshops totaling 120 contact hours. That's more than what they would need to renew their state license over the course of a five-year period. Even after they report their course participation, there's no repository for the teachers to access to see what they have completed and what is still outstanding."

Pamela replied, "It sounds like there are logistical challenges every which way you turn. It would be helpful for me to further investigate some of the issues you've mentioned today. I'd like to try and wrap my head around understanding what's causing some of these issues and whether there is anything we can do to alleviate some of the challenges that everyone has been facing. This isn't an ideal situation for your team, the teachers, or the students."

She continued, "If you had to pick, what are the top three issues you would like for me to try and address in my first year?"

"The student discipline is extremely out of hand," said Bryson. "There is a huge issue with disrespect. Students not only disrespect teachers and administrators, but they also disrespect themselves." Bryson shared that presently 20% of students initiate disruptions. "That means that every class has roughly two students who completely distract teachers and disrupt the learning of others."

Sheri interjected, "Our main goal in terms of the professional development of our teachers is to make teachers better by building on their individual talents. I really think that if student discipline issues could be resolved, our turnover rate of 48% would decrease."

Matthew shared, “It’s imperative that we focus on identifying ways in which we can change the culture of the school to aim for higher standards. The teachers need to have higher expectations for their students and they need to have higher expectations for themselves. The community expectations needed to be increased as well. The community should think highly of the school and be more connected.”

Pamela was vigorously writing notes in her notepad. At the end of the meeting, the administrative team and Pamela agreed that her needs assessment would focus on addressing the following three needs:

1. The decrease in Student Discipline Issues
2. Strengthen Teacher Capacity & Increase Teacher Retention
3. Strengthen Community Connection/Involvement

CASE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this project was to conduct a needs assessment to address a large number of student discipline challenges in a mid-Atlantic middle school. Upon speaking with administration, it became apparent to Pamela that teachers’ time was being consumed with classroom management and behavioral issues. Her needs assessment focused on addressing three priority needs for the school: 1) decrease student discipline issues; 2) strengthen teacher capacity and increase teacher retention, and 3) strengthen relationships with the local community.

The issues identified by the school administrators were escalating and impacting other areas of student performance. By conducting a needs assessment, Pamela was better positioned to validate and prioritize the needs (Altschuld & Kumar, 2010; Peterson, 2004) and make recommendations that would take into account the systemic implications.

During initial meetings with the principal, Bryson Jackson, and his administrative team, it was reported that 20% of students in the school were initiating class disruptions. The continued disruptions were distracting the teachers and interfering with the learning of others. The nature of disruptions involved students disrespecting teachers, administrators, and their peers. It was also reported that the average annual turnover rate for teachers at the school was approximately 48%. Bryson was hopeful that if student discipline issues could be resolved that the turnover rate would decrease.

A third area to be explored during the needs assessment involves strengthening community relationships with the school. Many of the students participated in after-school programs hosted by local non-profit organizations. Pamela chose to explore the existing relationships between these programs and the school in an attempt to

align recommended interventions in order to provide students with a consistent message regarding expectations of their behavior.

Pamela used Witkin and Altschuld's (1995) three-phase needs assessment model to guide our needs assessment. She chose this model as it allowed her to approach the identified needs from multiple lenses and address the needs of multiple constituents. Data was gathered from multiple sources to allow for triangulation (Lee, Altschuld, & White, 2007; Peterson, 2004). Furthermore, the model promotes a layered approach to needs assessment to help refine and validate needs and align appropriately with suggested recommendations (Altschuld & Kumar, 2010).

Project Objectives

In order to ensure alignment with the needs expressed by the administration of the middle school, the data Pamela would be collecting, and recommended solutions, performance objectives were identified for each need. The purpose of this was to help Pamela maintain focus as she conducted the needs assessment (Altschuld & Witkin, 1999; Hunet et al., 2002). Objectives for each of the three performance needs are described in Table 2.

Recognizing that there were multiple stakeholders involved that would be affected by recommendations made as a result of the needs assessment, Pamela wanted to make sure that she had an opportunity to engage with all of the constituents. This would help ensure that their individual needs would be taken into account as she gathered data and began to analyze what was causing some of the challenges expressed by the administrative team.

Table 2. Needs assessment project objectives

Need 1: Decrease in Student Discipline Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Analyze the cause of the discipline problems● Collect specific data through student focus groups● Ensure all teachers have set behavior expectations and consistent consequences● Ensure that punishments presently set in place are effective and not simply a way to move the student into a different area of the school● Research and suggest alternate activities for disruptive students
Need 2: Build Teacher Capacity and Increase Retention
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Analyze the cause of the problems● Meet with professional development director for our school system to inquire about opportunities for our teachers to grow and improve
Need 3: Strengthen Relationships with the Local Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Survey the teachers asking for community involvement ideas● Research community connection projects for students

As Pamela pondered over the project objectives to further examine the three identified needs, she was mindful of the need to triangulate any information that she would be gathering to better understand the situation at Miller Middle School. With the support and encouragement of Bryson and his team, Pamela began developing data collection tools to assist with gathering the necessary information.

Understanding Teachers' Perceptions

Pamela developed a survey to administer to the 40 certified teachers who were currently working at Miller Middle School. As she crafted the questions asking for the teachers to share their perceptions regarding student disciplinary issues in the classroom, the need for professional development for teachers, and current relations with the community, she was mindful that she wanted to allow the teachers to speak openly and honestly. In order to accomplish this, Pamela ensured that the survey could be completed anonymously. She did not want to bother the teachers with additional work during school time, she sent out an email prior to the survey to ask for their participation and explaining the purpose of her needs assessment. She clarified that the survey would not automatically result in students with behavioral issues being removed from their classes. She also made sure to assure the teachers that the results of the survey would add to their existing workload.

The main purpose of the survey was to obtain a general, overall picture of possible “hidden needs” or to justify the stated needs expressed by Bryson’s team. Pamela wanted to explore the larger picture pertaining to just how many students disrupt classrooms, how much support teachers actually receive, teachers’ priorities, and some major issues such as administrative effectiveness. Additionally, she solicited responses from the teachers to get an idea regarding what type of community connections they would like to see as well as any suggestions they might have to offer. With regard to building teacher capacity, Pamela was extremely curious to find out in just how many professional development opportunities the teachers had participated and if they were even effective. Due to some of the discrepancies between the teacher responses, Pamela decided to conduct a few follow-up interviews to get a better understanding of their situations.

Conducting Focus Groups With Students

Pamela knew that it was important for her to meet with students to hear their thoughts regarding the challenges around teacher turnover and classroom management as they were directly affected. In order to better understand the root causes of some of

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the classroom disruptions, Pamela conducted focus groups with students who were causing the majority of disruptions. She also wanted to hear from students who were not involved in any of the classroom disruptions.

Pamela was careful to ensure the parents and guardians of these students were notified and aware that their child would be participating in her focus group. She received consent from most of the parents. She also made sure that she dismissed any of her own preconceived notions that the families of these children are the reason for their poor behavior. She remained focused on trying to identify ways in which the school could best support them. The following are a list of some of the questions Pamela intended to ask the students during the focus groups.

1. Do you enjoy the social aspect of school?
2. Who are three adults at this school who you feel you could approach if you needed help with something?
3. What is your favorite subject or what was it in elementary school?
4. What are your career dreams?
5. What was the last book you read?
6. Do you enjoy reading or have you ever enjoyed reading?
7. Do you feel like this school supports your needs?
8. If not, which needs do you feel are not being supported?

Exploring Current Professional Development Opportunities Available Through the District

When Pamela was hired to lead the professional development efforts for the teachers, she was already aware that there were a large number of development opportunities that were currently available to the teachers. Before she made any recommendations to eliminate any of the existing offerings or develop new lessons, she wanted to better understand the current system that was in place.

Pamela met with Dr. Sally David, the Director of Professional Development for the school district. She also met with Associate Superintendent of the school district. The purpose of these meetings was to address the current professional development opportunities offered or, judging by the teacher survey responses, the lack thereof.

CURRENT CHALLENGES FACING THE ORGANIZATION

Teacher Perspectives

Pamela was happy to report to Bryson and his team that she had the opportunity to engage with teachers, students, and community members to better understand the performance gaps and challenges that were taking place at Miller Middle School. A total of 33 teachers out of 40 completed her survey. The main purpose of this survey was to obtain a general, overall picture of possible “hidden needs” or to justify the stated needs of the client.

The results of the survey revealed that five students on average disrupt each teacher’s class each day. When students are sent to the office for a behavior issue, it is 45.5% likely the problem will persist and 33.3% extremely likely it will persist, which means the administration is not effective with regard to student discipline. Teachers are 57.7% likely to contact parents regarding a discipline situation. When teachers contact parents regarding a discipline issue, it is, on average, unlikely that the problem will be resolved. Teachers mostly disagreed when they were asked if they have autonomy over their planning time. When teachers were asked if they were given the option to choose professional development opportunities, which personally strengthen them as an educator, 9.1% strongly disagreed, 30.3% disagreed, and 24.2% somewhat disagreed. The majority of teachers strongly agreed that if there were opportunities presented, which would strengthen their profession, they would be willing to participate. 45.5% of teachers prefer professional development activities to take place on required teacher workdays. Other methods included: online and during the day with substitutes hired. None of the teachers preferred “during planning time,” when some of the professional development opportunities are offered.

The most shocking finding was that on average, teachers attended 5 professional development opportunities per year, 2 of which benefitted their own personal needs as educators. Where support is concerned, surprisingly, 48.5% of teachers agree that the parents of their students support them. 9.1% strongly agree, 57.6% agree and 18.2% strongly agree that they feel supported by the administration. This was conflicting because of the fact that the administration was “unlikely” to solve discipline problems, therefore, Pamela decided to look into this further.

Also conflicting, was the survey data showing that 12.1% of teachers strongly agree and 54.5% agree that they feel supported by the community. When asked if Miller Middle School provided opportunities for parents to connect with the school, 21.2% strongly agreed and 63.6% agreed. The majority of the teachers feel supported

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by the instructional coaches, interventionists, and digital integration facilitator. 34.4% disagree that central office staff supports them and 12.1% strongly disagree.

The teachers did make suggestions for how Miller Middle School could strengthen their relationship with the community and improve classroom management are included in Table 3.

During the follow-up interviews with the teachers, Pamela asked them to explain how the administration does support them. The following is a summary of their responses:

- “I honestly feel it’s because the kids don’t change. When I have discipline problems it is from repeat offenders that don’t seem to learn. Admin is stepping in and doing their part. They meet with the kids. We come up with incentives however, the culprits are not doing their part to change the behavior.”
- “I feel like the principals support my decision that they are making bad choices and give me autonomy in my class, however, I don’t feel that the behavior support system for the school is effective or making a difference for the hard problem kids (of which I spend most of my time)”
- “We have set up meetings with students and created behavior contracts—that actually get followed through on.”

Table 3. Teacher recommendations for addressing project needs

Suggestions for Strengthening Community Relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Make conferences mandatory for parents.” ● “Parents should be required to attend a training session where they are fed and taught the expectations and ways in which they are expected to support their students and their school.” ● “Student-led community service activities.” ● “Maybe students could go out and observe various businesses.”
Suggestions for Improving School Culture and Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Teachers that are lateral entry or brand new need to be given a clear and concise road map and calendar to follow. They should not have to struggle to figure out what is required or have to argue to get their accomplishments acknowledged.” ● “If we can get discipline under control and get effective leadership, then we would not have to worry about teacher retention. Our leadership is our biggest hurdle to overcome. We kind of seem to be the dumping ground for ineffective leaders that they don’t know what to do with.” ● “Building a class for the students who are known for disruptive and removing them from the students who truly want to learn. The disruptive students really don’t want to learn, so place them in a class together and let them ruin the learning for each other as opposed to ruining it for everyone else. Far too many of our students are being cheated out of the education they deserve because of disruptive students.” ● “Follow through with discipline procedures.” ● “I feel overwhelmed when it comes to parent/guardian contact. I know that I personally do not do it enough. I would like more time during the work hours to call them.”

- “Admin will let the student come to their office for a student to regroup when the student has it together enough, they are welcome to come back to class.”
- Sometimes the administrator even comes to me and asks for my opinion on what the punishment should be for the offending student.”

Supporting the Needs of Students at Miller Middle School

The purpose of the student focus groups was to compare the habits and characteristics of the students who earned the most behavior referrals in the school and the highest achieving students (both academically and behaviorally). Questions were asked to each student privately and their responses were recorded. Students were then gathered as a group to discuss future school options.

Pamela was originally expecting all the students who exhibit poor classroom behavior to make statements such as, “I don’t like to read,” “I don’t have a favorite subject,” and “I don’t know what I want to be when I get older.” Ironically, both the high achieving students who maintain excellent behavior had the same answers as the students who received behavior referrals. Every single student interviewed stated that they enjoyed reading. They even added that they enjoyed being read to. All students stated they had a favorite subject and it was either math, language arts, social studies, or science. All students stated their future dream profession. One of the female students who received a referral about every day stated her passion for becoming a pediatrician.

When Pamela asked what the school could do to better support their needs, every student in both groups stated that they would like to see more class options offered, for example, computer science/coding, a more hands-on, intense career studies course, graphic design, sports history, and mechanics. While the focus group responses do not

condone disrespectful student behaviors, but by analyzing this data, it does suggest that some of the disruptive students may be willing to work very hard to succeed if motivated.

Current Professional Development Opportunities

Dr. David’s administrative assistant stated, “Approximately 165 sessions throughout the school year are offered. School menu offerings are selected by the principal and School Improvement Team and are offered on the school site.”

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Pamela was confused. How was it that 156 PD sessions are offered and teachers are attending an average of 5 per year? The question might not be, “Why are teachers not attending more,” but rather, “Why is the district spending so much time and money on professional development opportunities that nobody attends or benefits?”

Another major discrepancy exists among the method in which teachers may access most PD opportunities. This method is a website called Home Station. This is an extremely non-user-friendly site, which most teachers purposely steer clear of unless they need to sign off on their observations. I found that most of the PD opportunities may be accessed through this site. The other problem is that Miller Middle School’s District does have a PD site of their own, but most of the teachers do not even know where to find it. When I visited this site myself, there was not a list of exciting PD offerings or anything of interest. There is simply a list of directions explaining how to access Home Station.

The most shocking information was that this district’s yearly budget for professional development ranges from \$278,000 - \$352,000. This rose yet another red flag. Due to this discrepancy in data, Pamela decided to go a step further and meet with Dr. Mitchell Robins, the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Support Services. He agreed with Pamela that the present PD System registration is not user-friendly by any means. Dr. Robins stated that PD is a mixed bag and that it is mostly managed by school administration on school-site. Additionally, countywide PD is usually not mandatory.

When Pamela presented her concerns regarding professional development to Dr. Robins, he showed her a website that he is trying to persuade the district to purchase. It is called mylearningplan.com. The purpose of the site is to offer staff professional development in a friendly way. [Mylearningplan.com](http://mylearningplan.com) allows teachers to log in, choose PDs, which are best suited to their needs, and it stores all of their CEU Credits for easy access. He mentioned how difficult it was for him to log into Home Station. He stated that the present methods for achieving professional development credits were extremely unclear, especially for new teachers. If his plan succeeds, this new method would be available for teachers by this August. He also informed Pamela that the district does receive Title II Money, which is specifically deemed for professional development, therefore when teachers are only utilizing five opportunities per school year, something is definitely wrong.

Since Dr. Robins shared that he used to be the principal of an alternative high school, Pamela decided to take this interview a step further and ask a few questions regarding influencing the changing of the culture at Miller Middle School.

She asked him how he influenced the behavior of his students even though the students had a poor home life and very little parental involvement. He stated that every single teacher in the building had “Family Time,” which consisted of 45 minutes each morning. Each teacher had 12-14 students, all in different grade levels. In this time, they discussed problems, school, life, etc. They developed a bond. The teacher checked the grades and mentored the students. The older students began to feel responsible for the younger students and their relationships strengthened. It was as if the family situation that the students were missing, was achieved through “Family Time.” They even had a “Family Reunion” where food was brought and celebration occurred.

Pamela asked what he did to involve his community with the school. Dr. Robins shared that this was the toughest part of his job by far. He obtained some assistance from local churches and a few businesses, but that was about all that he could do.

After gathering data from the administration, teachers, and students, Pamela felt that she was ready to be brainstorming some strategies to help alleviate some of the challenges occurring at Miller Middle School.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing Student Discipline in the Classroom

After gathering information for her needs assessment and researching literature addressing classroom disciplinary issues, Pamela knew that her recommendations should follow an ecological approach. “Ecological approaches to classroom management, school-wide positive behavioral supports, and social and emotional learning” (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010, p. 48). The Ecological approach demonstrates the importance of a classroom environment where students collaboratively work in stations lasting for a certain amount of time and then they move to the next task. In this type of organization, the teacher acts as the facilitator. If the actual lessons are engaging and captivating enough, classroom behavior maintenance will, ultimately, become automatic. This system includes a solid foundation with regard to clear, common, consistent expectations. Additionally, classroom interventions occur and individualized student support is offered to prevent the need for administrative interventions. Students learn how to solve problems and adapt to their surrounding environment while managing their emotions and demonstrating self-discipline and social skills.

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Skiba (2000) emphasizes the notion that a “zero tolerance” policy may not be the most effective solution with regard to maintaining discipline among students. Other strategies such as preventative strategies, bullying prevention, and early identification are worth researching further. Most schools adhere to a zero-tolerance policy for the possession of weapons and/or drugs. Skiba addresses many “trivial instances” where the zero tolerance policies in schools caused students to receive harsh consequences for what seemed to be mistaken. This article stresses the necessity to instill consistency with regard to zero tolerance and the design of clear and concise expectations in an effort to maintain absolute equity. Additionally, these policies should not contain consequences such as expulsion for a student who brings a nail file to school. In addition to the ineffectiveness of a zero-tolerance policy for discipline, Skiba reiterates the fact that a large number of continuous “long-term suspensions and expulsions” eventually result in those students dropping out, thus proving this method of discipline to be ineffective.

Sugai, Sprague, Horner, and Walker (2000) contribute a unique approach to the student discipline problem, by addressing the importance of clearly and consistently documenting not only the discipline referrals but also the strategies and interventions associated with the infractions. To best suit the situations of the three different groups of students, categorized by their specific discipline needs, the following customized interventions, which represent a 3-tiered approach, are offered: Universal Interventions, Selected Interventions, and Targeted Interventions. Sugai, et al. (2000) emphasize the importance of schools utilizing a multitude of interventions based upon the unique student’s situation instead of simply relying on “the one perfect strategy”.

Pamela shared with Bryson and the Assistant Principals that there needs to be more attention from the county office level, with regard to hiring the administration for Miller Middle School. There should be an extra stipend for assistant principals willing to take on the disciplinary responsibilities specific to this school.

After speaking with the Director of the local Boys & Girls Club, he expressed his willingness to offer the teachers some professional development sharing some valuable tips addressing how to better connect with students and therefore decrease discipline issues among the school’s toughest population. Pamela recommended to the administration that Title I money should be set aside to pay for Boys and Girls Club Mentors to be onsite during the school day at least twice a week if not permanent additions to the school staff. These mentors would be available to assist with discipline, counseling, and reading assistance.

Community service opportunities for students should be the main priority of the school. Each homeroom should “adopt” a local non-profit organization.

These sites offer excellent opportunities for students to connect to not only their own community but the world as well.

Presently, elective teachers are not responsible for homeroom classes, nor are guidance, media, and instructional coaches. Each certified person, including encore teachers, guidance, media specialist, instructional coaches, should have an advisory time in the morning consisting of 30-45 minutes. This time should be called “Family Time” where the instructor is assigned no more than 15 students ranging in grades 6-8. During this time, the teacher will check grades, hold discussions, and mentor students. Older students will mentor younger students. This “family bond” should be continued throughout all 3 years of each student’s middle school experience.

During this time, expanded courses should be offered for students who are interested such as career studies where guest speakers talk to students about their careers, coding/computer science classes including Mobile CSP, graphic designs and 3D printing (since the school already has a state-of-the-art 3D printer) and STEM infusion classes. These course offerings could be enhanced through the Career and Technical Education (CTE) elective.

The CTE elective needs to include a real-world connection so that students may receive some hands-on job experiences. Having students create powerpoints about different careers is not enough to spark interest, nor is it going to keep interest alive. Guest speakers need to be brought to the classrooms; trips need to be taken to local businesses, and documentaries need to be shown so students may see their dream careers in action.

Strengthening Teacher Capacity and Increasing Retention

Teacher capacity building involves cultivating and nurturing teachers’ abilities over a wide range of dimensions. Broadly speaking, the conversation of teacher capacity encompasses three categories: (a) knowledge, including content and domain knowledge related to the subject-matter, pedagogical knowledge, education foundational knowledge, technological knowledge among many more, (b) craft skills, mainly concerning with planning, organizing, instructional materials, monitoring and disciplining students and evaluating their learning process, as well as work in collaboration with colleagues, parent, and the community; (c) dispositions, which include attitudes, beliefs, and views (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). Researchers and educational practitioners believed that the conceptions of teacher capacity continue to expand and evolve which reflects the currents status of the

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intellectual, social, technological, and political forces in a diverse world (Howard & Aleman, 2008). Enhancing teacher capacity requires abundant efforts in preservice teachers' training from teacher preparation programs in higher education institutions, as well as persistent endeavors in teacher training and professional development provided for junior in-service teachers.

The issue of teacher retention, especially the high attrition rate among early career teachers has been an increasing concern over the decades (Hong, 2012). The NCTAF (2003) national report concluded that beginning teachers' early attrition is the main contributor to the teacher shortage in urban and rural schools where poor and minority student makeup is remarkably high. Research showed that 14% of beginning teachers end their teaching job in their first year, 33% leave in three years, and almost 50% leave in five years (Wiebke, & Bardin, 2009; Haycock, 2006). Another report from a longitudinal study conducted on beginning teachers demonstrated that amongst all beginning teachers in the 2007–08 time period, 10% ceased their teaching profession in the first year, 12% did not teach in the second year, 15% did not teach in their third year, and 17 percent did not teach in their fourth year (Gray & Taie, 2015). In the state of West Virginia, approximately a fifth of early career teachers left their jobs by the end of their first year, and about a third had left by the end of their fourth year (Lochmiller, Adachi, Chesnut, & Johnson, 2016). In spite of state actions and legislation to reduce teacher attrition, the state of North Carolina also reported their highest attrition rate recorded at approximately 15% in 2015, which was 4% higher compared to what it was in 2010. The North Carolina State Board of Education (2015) reported that the overall state attrition rate during 2014-2015 was 14.84%.

In recent years, researchers increasingly have undertaken a considerable number of studies in an attempt to identify the reasons why teachers, especially some early career teachers, choose to leave shortly after their entry into the teaching profession while others choose to stay (De Stercke, Goyette, & Robertson, 2015; Rots, Aalterman, Devos, & Vlerick 2010). Teacher attrition and low retention rate is a non-linear and complex phenomenon often linked to a wide variety of interrelated reasons on both personal and institutional levels (Lindqvist, Nordänger, & Carlsson, 2014; Mertler, 2016). Beginning teachers' attrition is often associated with a low sense of self-efficacy of their classroom teaching and a dearth of on-the-job mentoring and support in the early stage of their teaching career (Nahal, 2009). Many teachers experience a disconnect between what they learned from teacher preparation programs and the day-to-day realities faced in the classroom. Leavers who displayed weaker self-efficacy beliefs tended to need additional support and assistance from school administrators and they are also more inclined to have created stress and emotional

burnout for themselves (Hong, 2012). Research showed that the struggle with classroom management is among one of the most critical reasons that caused them to leave the profession (Hong, 2012; Weiner, 2002).

To stay in teaching, teachers need to stay in supportive and healthy school conditions that promote growth and development (Cochran-Smith, 2004). School administration, such as principals, have a significant impact on teacher retention (Young, 2015). Efforts toward professional development for teachers, such as opportunities via cooperative teaching and planning with, college faculty member and, in-service professional development workshops, appear to considerably aid junior teachers' entry into and perseverance in teaching (Latham & Vogt, 2007; Monroe, Blackwell, & Pepper, 2010). Mentoring and induction programs have also been identified as a solution to alleviate the problem of early career teacher attrition and retention (Long et al., 2012).

After meeting with Dr. Robins and researching different professional development tracking systems for teacher professional development, Pamela recommended to Bryson and Dr. Robins that the website: <https://www.mylearningplan.com> needs to be adopted and implemented as soon as possible and Home Station needs to be discarded as the means for PD access. Dr. Robins asked Pamela if he could share her report with the district because many of her findings reiterated the need for a new direction.

Pamela also recommended that the district provide mandatory training on how to use this site. This training includes unlimited support and follow-up procedures. Pamela also suggested that there should be a website created to specifically house lesson plans teachers are willing to share with other teachers, especially beginning teachers. This site should include ideas for classroom management (that have been proven to work with this particular population), lesson ideas, and time management advice. It should also be a place where teachers can provide advice for new and beginning teachers. Teachers should be recognized for achievements on this site and college backgrounds should be celebrated.

Teachers at Miller Middle School are currently afforded an hour and a half planning time each day. Presently, 4 out of 5 of these sessions, teachers are required to meet with either other grade-level teachers or teachers who share their subject area. Pamela recommended that only one of these times be used to have a grade-level meeting. The other four sessions should be provided to the teachers to use for parent contact, personal lesson planning/grading, and optional online PD.

Strengthening Community Connection/Involvement

After meeting with administration, teachers, and the students, Pamela came to realize that this need was not as much of an issue as Bryson's team had suggested. She was unaware of the social media aspect with regard to the positive publicity the school was receiving. Secondly, the majority of the teachers felt supported by the community. If parental/community connections are to be made, teachers need to be afforded the time during the school day to complete these tasks. Presently, teachers do not feel as though they have autonomy over their planning time and this needs to change.

Since many of the students participated in afterschool programs with the local Boys and Girls Club and had shown favorable results, Pamela suggested that Miller Middle School establish a more formal relationship with the community organization. She suggested that the teachers should attend a mandatory PD Session taught by the director of the local Boys and Girls Club to learn about ways to better connect with our school population and effective discipline strategies.

In addition to strengthening relations with the immediate school community, Pamela suggested that the school enforce mandatory parent-teacher conferences once per year. She also suggested that the school appoint a school liaison who would be responsible for reporting positive occurrences to the local newspaper. This would help local community members see the good things being accomplished by members of the Miller Middle School community as well as motivate and recognize students for their achievements.

With all the recommendations Pamela presented to the administrative team, she was happy to report that each of these was very cost-effective. She was excited to hear back from administration and see how she could begin working with the school community to begin implementing her recommendations.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Attrition: A reduction or decrease in numbers.

CEU: Continuing education units. These are units that are provided to teachers after they have completed a certain number of lessons or hours of training.

Classroom Management: Strategies teachers employ to stay organized and help students focus on the content being taught.

Constituent: Objects or individuals that comprise a system (or community).

Discipline: Intervening to help an individual act in accordance with rules. Discipline is often taught through training and through the punishment of undesirable behavior.

Needs Analysis: An analysis that is conducted after a needs assessment is conducted. During analysis, practitioners explore the root causes driving performance gaps that have been identified in the needs assessment.

Needs Assessment: Conducting an assessment to identify performance gaps. Gaps are identified by discussing desired performance gaps and looking to see if there are discrepancies with current performance practices.

Professional Development: The opportunity for an individual to enhance existing skills and acquire new skills that may assist their performance at work.

Triangulation: A qualitative practice of gathering data from multiple sources and determining whether alignment and consistency exist among the data gathered.

Turnover: Change or movement of people within an organization.

APPENDIX: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. As a performance improvement practitioner, what are some of the systemic issues facing Miller Middle School? What might you do to evaluate if progress is made to address the issues you have identified?
2. What are some strategies that Pamela should consider when evaluating whether her recommendations were implemented effectively? How might she determine that the recommendations were successfully implemented if she were to follow-up after 12 months?
3. One of the challenges raised throughout this case was the significant number of requirements for teachers earning CEUs. What are some ways that you might revise the professional development training program if you were Pamela? What feedback would you provide the district office?
4. What are some additional strategies that Miller Middle School could employ for further engaging the community? How can the school ensure that parents, teachers, and students are all on the same page?
5. With the rate of turnover being very high at 48%, Miller Middle School has had a very difficult time retaining new teachers. What types of mentoring opportunities do you think the school might want to implement in an effort to support their newly hired teachers?