Teacher Burnout: Causes and Projected Preventative and Curative Interventions

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Teacher Burnout: Causes and Projected Preventative and Curative Interventions

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Abstract

Teacher Burnout: Causes and Projected Preventative and Curative Interventions

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Drexel University, December 2012

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This mixed methods study examined how teachers at Valley High School internalize the phenomenon of teacher burnout. Teachers at Valley High School are suffering from teacher burnout on a daily basis with little to no support. The teachers at Valley High School were asked to participate in a survey, semi-structured interviews, and class observations.

The study was conducted as a mixed-methods study, which offered Valley High School teachers the opportunity to share their thoughts and personal accounts to the phenomenon known as teacher burnout. The mixed-methods study provided the opportunity for triangulation of multiple data sources and evidence sources, as this study utilized teacher personal stories to drive the direction of study, as well as solutions to the problem.

The research methodology resulted in two main themes or patterns, and nine variables as part of the two themes: Theme #1. Internal Burnout Factors with variables: Teacher Burnout, Teacher Autonomy, Formal Evaluations, Negative Student Behavior, Teacher Workloads, Principal-Teacher Relationships. Theme #2. External Burnout Factors with variables: School Funding, Budget Cuts, Standardized Testing (School Reform). Numerous recommendations emerged from this study, with the majority of the recommendations suggested for “in house” changes that can be implemented by school site administrators and teachers.
Dedication

I thank God for the daily blessings bestowed upon us; I ultimately dedicate myself to your will and grace. To my mother, Summaya, thank you for making miracles and being the strongest person I know. Mom, you are my best friend and my hero. I love you mom. To my sister, Tina, thank you for being such a loving and supporting sister, I hope you are proud of me. To my brother, Yasser, thank you for being a friend. I can always count on you for a good laugh, a funny joke, or a late night food craving, thank you brother. To my wife, Muntaha, thank you for your heart, your love, and a future full of blessings. I ask that God fill our hearts with love, joy, health, and happiness. I love you. To my brother-in-law, Firas, thank you for being a brother to me. To my nephews, Taha, Uday, Adam, I love you guys, and I wish you great success and health for you in your futures. To my two nieces, Byan and Susu, I love you like you were my daughters. To my sister-in-law, Amal, thank you for the love of a sister.

To my brother, Warad, thank you. Thank you for being an older brother. Thank you for being a father. Thank you for being a provider. Thank you for being a leader. You sacrificed so much of your own dreams and desires so I can fulfill mine, I will never forget this. Your strength and dedication to us, your family and to me, is unwavering and for this I am everlastingly in debt to you. I will never forget what you have done for us, how you raised us and how you showed us what hard work looks like and what true dedication is. Your responsibilities to us were before your time and before your age; it was not fair for you to take on so much at such a young age. You were dealt a tough-hand by fate from the start, yet you took on those responsibilities and paved the way for us to
be who we are today...you are the true definition of what a real man is. Thank you for everything.
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To my Drexel University cohort and classmates I say thank you, it has been a pleasure to spend quality time with you. All of you have given me valuable experiences
that I will learn from for years to come. Each of you, in your own special way, has provided me with “real life” learning opportunities and I am thankful for that. I wish you folks the best in life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

Introduction

Education is the main staple of many cultures, civilizations, and family structures within our global society and within American society. Many Americans value education and its limitless benefits, but unfortunately many in American society do not value the teachers who provide this education (Farber, 2010). This “disvaluing” of education and teachers is primarily the outcome of political contention, political agendas, and failed reform. The unintended consequences of the “political education agenda” has left teachers as the victims of budget cuts, furloughs, involuntary transfers, increased class sizes, increased job duties, and fewer resources (Farber, 2010).

Teachers play a paramount role in American society. Teachers develop our youth, influence career paths, and provide structure and support; a teacher impacts every member of America’s society in one way or another. The teaching profession has long been a valued profession; teachers were seen as a “life line” to shape the minds of our youth. But as of late, teachers are suffering from external social and political factors leaving many educators in dismay and frustration (Dworkin, 2009). The education skills and abilities of America’s students are being challenged more than ever, and not through logical, pedagogical mediums and assessments, but rather through extreme, politically driven generic standards that fail to address and acknowledge students’ cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Dworkin, 2009). Politically motivated misguided educational reforms make up just one of many issues with which teachers must contend while attempting to successfully educate students to their fullest individual potentials.
(Green, 2010). As teachers continue to contend with increased external factors, they find themselves losing their spirit, drive, focus, and love for the profession (Fisher, 2011). The numerous pressures teachers face from these external factors mount year after year. Social challenges, media advancements, political mandates, and economic hardships lead to complex forces challenging teachers as they attempt to educate students. Such complex factors are depleting teachers of the motivation, spirit, and drive that used to be associated with the profession (Simbula & Guglielmi, 2010). More than ever, teachers are now feeling the results of “teacher burnout,” a condition that causes teachers to feel mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted from working in stressful situations (Rosales, 2011).

Teacher burnout is described as a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for teaching that ultimately leads to poor teaching practices, thus leading to poor student achievement (Wood & McCarthy, 2002). According to Chang (2009), numerous factors cause teacher burnout; these factors include political mandates (No Child Left Behind and A Nation at Risk); lack of autonomy and freedom as a teacher; lack of funding and resources for teachers; organizational structures of schools (Yong & Yue, 2007); role ambiguity; performance evaluations; personal and professional relationships with administrators; as well as individual characteristics (Fisher, 2011).

Teacher burnout at Valley High School is prevalent among several teachers; these teachers teach a variety of subjects and grade levels. The actual symptoms and signs of teacher burnout are manifested within the walls of these teachers’ classrooms daily, at Valley High School. Teacher burnout negatively impacts student-teacher relationships, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. Teachers are the ones who suffer from
burnout, teachers are the ones who feel the effect of burnout, but, ultimately, students are the victims. The students are the ones missing valuable opportunities to be properly educated.

Teacher burnout is a phenomenon occurring in classrooms and in teachers for decades; it is not a new phenomenon. Teacher burnout has been taking place ever since public schools existed, the only significant change regarding it is how this phenomenon is studied and how much researchers understand teacher burnout. Teacher burnout is manifested in teachers at Valley High School through three major indicators: emotional exhaustion, decreased feelings of professional and self-accomplishments, and depersonalization.

**Statement of the Problem to Be Researched**

Teachers at Valley High School are suffering from teacher burnout on a daily basis with little to no support.

**Purpose and Significance of the Problem**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to discover how Valley High School teachers described teacher burnout. Valley High School teachers were also asked to describe what contributing elements lead to teacher burnout and what support would best alleviate or prevent burnout from setting in. The significance of this study is it will provide Valley High School teachers with a support structure. Providing support structures to Valley High School teachers will help alleviate and stop burnout. The support structure will help Valley High School teachers participate in an action-based professional development workshop. The professional development workshop will provide much needed support and mentoring, as well as professional development. This
study of teacher burnout at Valley High School is important because students depend on healthy, energized, mentally stable, and creative teachers to educate them to high levels of success. The nature of this problem is it is rooted within the classrooms of teachers at Valley High School. This problem must be addressed in order to support teachers in their efforts to educate students.

**Research Questions Focused on Solution Finding**

The research questions that sustained this mixed-methods research on teacher burnout were derived from the daily concerns and comments Valley High School teachers expressed. The frustrations many Valley High School teachers face on a daily basis are frustrations associated with teacher burnout. The research questions were focused on the teachers at Valley High School and how they viewed teacher burnout. The research questions are as follows:

1. How would teachers at Valley High School describe teacher burnout?
2. What would teachers at Valley High School say are the key contributing elements or factors that cause teacher burnout?
3. What suggestions or interventions would teachers at Valley High School provide as a means to prevent or alleviate teacher burnout?

**The Conceptual Framework**

**Researcher’s Stance**

I have been in education for six years, two as a teacher and four as an administrator. During my first two years, I worked at two different schools; at both schools, I noticed the majority of the teachers had little respect for the principal and no
confidence in the principal as a leader. The principals relied on the “flavor of the week” professional development that did not meet the needs of staff members; this lack of leadership and support ultimately led teachers to have little regard for their profession. There was no accountability from the principal, no leadership, no staff input of schoolwide mandates, and no internal leadership or advancement opportunities.

Teachers slowly started showing resentment toward their jobs, toward each other, toward the principal, and even toward students; burnout had set in among many. Having personally experienced this phenomenon with other teachers at such an early stage in my career helped me realize the most important thing I can do as a school site administrator is to support teachers in their daily job duties. As a result, my interest in supporting teachers grew, I conducted research and asked my mentors questions, read articles, and discovered the concept of “teacher burnout,” thus resulting in an interest to study teacher burnout. As an administrator, I want to be able to support teachers as effectively as possible. The more teachers I can support means more teachers who will support student success. I want to be an effective leader who is able to support teachers in their efforts to successfully educate students to high levels of achievement.

As a social science teacher who has a personal passion for history and understanding people as a culture through historical accounts, it is within my nature to look at things through the paradigm of a “social constructivist.” My personality is the type that makes me seek an understanding of the world around me. I feel a strong connection with people and believe education is a “social activity,” as well as an academic one. I like open-ended discussions and questioning strategies. I appreciate and value social interaction and human contact. My personal history and experiences shape
the world around me. I come to my profession with a world of personal knowledge and prior learning. This prior knowledge is valuable as I attempt to explore and understand teachers at Valley High School and how burnout affects them.

As a pragmatist, I aim to look at the “what and how” in what I am researching. I want to know what teacher burnout is, and I want to know how it affects teachers at Valley High School. A mixed-methods approach provides the most inclusive research. I am interested in the facts and rigid structure of statistical data and numbers, but I also value the human element that provides emotional and personal interpretations. As a pragmatist, I aim to understand the world around me through my prior and personal history, life experiences, work experiences, and using logic to make sense of it all. A mixed-methods design offers me a personal and logical understanding of what teachers at Valley High School need to stay motivated in their “daily grind” of educating students to high levels of achievement.

**Research Streams**

The three research streams for this study on teacher burnout at Valley High School are organized around the following concepts in relation to burnout:

1. Emotional Exhaustion
2. Depersonalization
3. Decreased feelings of personal and professional accomplishments

William Atkinson (2005) provided in-depth detail on how emotional exhaustion negatively impacts victims of burnout. Meier, Back, and Morrison (2011) examined how a lack of professional and personal self-worth (lack of confidence) hinders those suffering
from burnout. Sierra-Siegert (2007) touched upon the frightening negative impact depersonalization can have on those suffering from burnout.

**Emotional exhaustion.** “Emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of psychic energy or the draining of emotional resources” (Anbar & Eker, 2007, p. 15). Emotional stress and burnout causes great damage to the mental state and physical state of the human body. This physical and mental harm is the result of feeling anxious, tense, frustrated, and angry for extended periods of time with no alleviation (Kim, 2005). Emotional exhaustion can be seen as the overuse or overwhelming of one’s emotions through extensive demands from others, leading to a feeling of barrenness in which the individual can no longer continue meeting the demands (Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Jaffe-Gill & Larson, 2007).

Once emotional exhaustion sets in, individuals no longer value involvement in professional and personal events (Kim, 2005). Teachers who suffer from burnout no longer have a drive and passion for teaching. Daily routines simply turn into an attempt to just go through the motions and get through the day as soon as possible (Schwab, 1983). Such loss of passion, drive, motivation, and seriousness of work results in poor teaching practices, which ultimately results in poor student performance and low achievement (Anbar & Eker, 2007; Botwinik, 2007; Godt, 2006; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

**Depersonalization.** Depersonalization results from prolonged stress that has led to burnout. This result of burnout causes individuals, teachers, and professionals to wish they could be left alone and have no other persons interact with them (Hamann & Gordon, 2000). Individuals suffering from depersonalization become unresponsive to
other people’s needs. Depersonalization causes negative, detached, calloused, and dehumanizing actions toward other individuals for no reason (Anbar & Eker, 2007). Depersonalization can cause individuals to feel little or no self-worth, leading to feelings of reduced personal accomplishments and no desire to accomplish job-related tasks and assignments (Hamann & Gordon, 2000). Depersonalization in teachers is critical to student achievement. If teachers are lacking the feelings to professionally accomplish their jobs, students will fail and student achievement will be inadequate (Dworkin, 2001; Wood & McCarthy, 2002). Teachers who suffer from burnout tend to develop cynical attitudes toward students and illustrate behaviors including: use of derogatory comments and/or extreme sarcasm, paying little to no attention to students’ needs, and a breakdown in communication (Anbar & Eker, 2007; Schwab, 1983). All of the above leads to poor teaching practices, resulting in low and inadequate achievement (Dworkin, 2001; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

**Decreased professional/personal accomplishments.** Individuals face numerous stressors in their daily lives. These stressors, if experienced over a long period of time or at a frequent rate, will turn into burnout. The effects of burnout vary from person to person depending on their situation and experiences. Burnout decreases job performance, job satisfaction, job commitment, and quality of service. Burnout increases absenteeism, low morale, and job turnover (Anbar & Eker, 2007). All these signs and symptoms are related to burnout and to a decreased feeling of professional and personal accomplishments. Teachers who feel over-stressed or burnt out lack the drive to professionally develop or personally accomplish goals. It is cyclical; teachers who lack
drive to accomplish personal goals and professional development are at greater risk to develop burnout (Anbar & Eker, 2007).

The epistemology of stress and burnout can be directly attributed to the studies and findings of Dr. Hans Selye (1907-1982), known as the “Dr. of Stress.” He has also been called the “Einstein of medicine” and spent over 50 years studying stress (Smith, 1987). Dr. Selye published over 38 volumes and more than 1600 professional articles on stress including those on causes, effects, and prevention (Smith, 1987). Dr. Selye held over 20 honorary degrees from universities all around the world and was part of 68 “Honorary Fellow” Scientific-Medical Societies (Smith, 1987). Dr. Selye was honored in 2007, with a world symposium of stress presented in his honor: The Hans Selye Symposium of Stress: University of Quebec, Montreal, Canada (Smith, 1987). Dr. Selye is credited with the “General Adaptation Syndrome” (GAS); a theory/study explaining how stress spreads to the whole body in three stages: the alarm stage, the stage of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion (Smith, 1987).

**Definition of Terms**

**Burnout**

The definition includes the feelings of failure, emotional exhaustion, physical exhaustion, and psychological exhaustion (Fisher, 2011).

**Depersonalization**

Stressors that lead to feelings of uncertainty for victims of burnout. Those who suffer also report feelings of anxiety, vertigo, and isolation (Varughese, Gazdar, & Chopra, 2008).
Mental Exhaustion

Feeling constantly tired and worn out and affects a person’s job, relationships, and energy levels. Mental exhaustion can lead to burnout, depression, and health problems (Anbar & Eker, 2007).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

A George W. Bush Administration education reform created to close the achievement gap between Caucasian students and students of color. The education reform is also intended to close the achievement gap between students of poverty and their affluent counterparts (Ansary, 2007).

Physical Exhaustion

Burnout can severely damage the human body and have lifelong-lasting effects that are life-threatening (Varughese et al., 2008). The human body reacts to daily stress from work, relationships, and personal conflict just as it would react to extreme fear, worry, or a sense of threat and physical conflict. Stress actually changes the body’s biochemical state and creates an imbalance of chemicals in the bloodstream (Varughese et al., 2008).

Role Ambiguity

When professional roles are not defined, standards and objectives become forgotten and go unused, resulting in lowered expectations and performance and leaving room for growth of professional role ambiguity in teachers (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008).
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Teacher burnout is a serious problem that negatively impacts student success at Valley High School. The level of seriousness and urgency of this topic led to the assumption that research participants, Valley High School teachers, would be honest, open, and truthful in their participation.

Limitations to this study on teacher burnout include time restrictions during the year for the conducting of a proper study; school calendars last nine months and are often interrupted with vacations and holidays. This presented a problem because observations, interviews, and surveys needed to be conducted little to no interruptions from breaks in the school year calendar (for example, winter or summer breaks). Long vacations and teaching breaks in the school calendar help alleviate symptoms of burnout. This research was contingent on Valley High School teachers who were suffering from burnout.

Lack of volunteer participation by the Valley High School teaching staff could create possible limitations to this project; some teachers might not feel comfortable in participating in this study on teacher burnout.

This study was conducted at Valley High School and could lead to results being flawed due to unique demographic characteristics (staff and/or students). Results could also be flawed because the study was being conducted by an insider, part of the organizational structure of the research site.

Summary

Teachers at Valley High School suffer from teacher burnout on a daily basis with little to no support. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to help teachers at Valley High School. The goal of this research was to discover how Valley High School
teachers personally described teacher burnout in relation to their daily jobs and duties. Responding to a survey, and being part of interviews, Valley High School teachers were also asked to describe what contributing elements lead to burnout and what support would best alleviate or prevent burnout from setting in. The significance of this study is that it would provide Valley High School teachers with a support structure. Providing support structures to Valley High School teachers may help alleviate and stop burnout. The support structure is helping Valley High School teachers participate in an action-based professional development workshop. The professional development workshop will provide needed peer support and mentoring, as well as professional development.

This study of teacher burnout at Valley High School is important because students depend on healthy, energized, mentally stable, and creative teachers to educate them to high levels of success. The nature of this problem is that it is rooted in the classrooms of teachers at Valley High School. The problem must be addressed to support teachers in their efforts to educate students. This study on teacher burnout at Valley High School will lead to a solution, a professional development workshop that will help teachers deal with burnout. The aim of this solution is to provide the teachers at Valley High School ownership in developing support structures that combat stress and teacher burnout development.
Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction to the Problem

Teacher burnout is described as a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for teaching that ultimately leads to poor teaching practices, and thus to poor student achievement (Wood & McCarthy, 2002). According to Chang (2009), numerous factors cause teacher burnout. Such factors include political mandates (school reform: No Child Left Behind and Nation at Risk), lack of autonomy and freedom as a teacher, lack of funding and resources for teachers, organizational structures of schools (Yong & Yue, 2007), role ambiguity, performance evaluations, personal and professional relationships with administrators, as well as individual characteristics (Fisher, 2011). Teacher burnout at Valley High School is prevalent among several teachers; these teachers teach a variety of subjects and grade levels. The actual symptoms and signs of teacher burnout are manifested within the walls of these teachers’ classrooms daily, at Valley High School. Teacher burnout negatively impacts student-teacher relationships, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. Teachers are the ones who suffer from burnout, teachers are the ones who feel the effect of burnout, but, ultimately, students are the victims. The students are the ones missing valuable opportunities to be properly educated.

Teacher burnout is a phenomenon occurring in classrooms and in teachers for decades; it is not a new phenomenon. Teacher burnout has been taking place ever since public schools existed, the only significant change regarding it is how this phenomenon is studied and how much researchers understand teacher burnout. Teacher burnout is manifested in teachers at Valley High School through three major indicators: emotional
exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased feelings of professional and self-accomplishments. The problem to be researched is that teachers at Valley High School are suffering from teacher burnout on a daily basis with little to no support.

**The Conceptual Framework**

As a social science teacher who has a personal passion for history and understanding people as a culture through historical accounts, it is within my nature to look at things through the paradigm of a “social constructivist.” My personality causes me to seek an understanding of the world around me. I feel a strong connection with people and believe education is a “social activity” as well as an academic one. I like open-ended discussions and questioning strategies. I appreciate and value social interaction and human contact. My personal history and experiences shape the world around me. I come to my profession with a world of personal knowledge and prior learning. This prior knowledge is valuable as I attempt to explore and understand teachers at Valley High School and how burnout affects them.

As a pragmatist, I aim to look at the “what and how” in what I am researching. I want to know what teacher burnout is, and I want to know how it affects teachers at Valley High School. A mixed-methods approach provides the most inclusive research. I am interested in the facts and rigid structure of statistical data and numbers, but I also value the human element that provides for emotional and personal interpretations. As a pragmatist, I aim to understand the world around me through my prior and personal history, both life and work experiences, and use logic to make sense of it all. Mixed methods offers me a personal and logical understanding of what teachers at Valley High School need to stay motivated in their “daily grind” of educating students to high levels
of achievement. Figure 1 is an illustration of the conceptual framework design used in this study on teacher burnout.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework design.

The Literature Review

This literature review provides an extensive explanation of the phenomenon known as teacher burnout. The focus of this study is constructed around three main questions and three main conceptual themes. The questions are:

1. How would teachers at Valley High School describe teacher burnout?
2. What would teachers at Valley High School say are the key contributing elements or factors that cause teacher burnout?
3. What suggestions or interventions would teachers at Valley High School provide as a means to prevent or alleviate teacher burnout?

The conceptual themes are Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Decreased professional/personal accomplishments. The research methodology and data collection process support the discovery and findings of what Valley High School teachers think of teacher burnout, which was the aim of the study. The literature review supports that discovery process by helping to organize, conceptualize, and bring life to the three themes. It is paramount the three themes be organized in a manner that is logical and supportive of the overall study.

Introduction

In the 1950s and 1960s, Dr. Hans Selye discovered the first major breakthrough in the study of stress on the human body (Smith, 1987). Dr. Selye discovered the human body reacts to stress in three major stages: alarm stage, resistance stage, and exhaustion stage (Smith, 1987). In the 1970s, Dr. H. J. Fruedenberger, an American psychologist, discovered that prolonged stress on the human body results in emotional and physical exhaustion, ultimately leading to burnout (Canter, 2001; Urich, 2006). According to Canter (2001), Dr. Fruedenberger was the first to use the term “burnout” to describe extreme emotional and physical exhaustion associated with the phenomenon that would later be defined as burnout. In the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, psychologist Dr. Christina Maslach took Selye’s and Fruedenberger’s work to an innovative level and applied their respective and collective theories to occupational burnout (Kalliath, O’Driscoll, Gillespie, & Bluedorn, 2000). Dr. Maslach examined how complicated working conditions, failing working systems, disorganized institutions, and negative interactions with co-workers
affected the motivation of employees in a variety of settings that included schools, colleges, and universities (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2001). Maslach, through extensive research, developed a tool to measure occupational burnout; this measurement was called the “Maslach Burnout Inventory” (MBI). The MBI is currently used worldwide and is identified by psychologists as the most valid tool for measuring occupational burnout (Kalliath, 2000). The key data collection tool used for this study at Valley High School is an adaptation of the MBI (Maslach, 1996).

Dr. Maslach discovered that burnout was a social problem, not a scholarly construct. According to Maslach (1996), burnout is a social problem (phenomenon) centering on social interaction between people in their work environments. Discovering that this phenomenon was a social issue was paramount to her research on burnout. Dr. Maslach was able to focus on social interactions and the work environment while researching, creating, and finalizing the “Maslach Burnout Inventory” (MBI). Dr. Maslach used three main components for measuring occupational burnout; all three components included concepts that relied heavily on social interactions. The three components consisted of the following: Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Decreased professional/personal accomplishments (Maslach, 1996). Dr. Maslach, through her extensive and multilevel research, found that burnout occurs on a continuum comprised of the three components. As part of a continuum, the three components are interrelated and grow from one another. The continuum theory starts with emotional exhaustion, which leads to depersonalization that is then manifested through professional and personal accomplishments (lack of). Figure 2 illustrates this concept.
It is important to note that although the graphic model does reflect each component individually, the concept of burnout includes all three components as continuous variables (Maslach, 2001). All three components are interrelated, but to fully understand how they are interrelated, each component must be explained.

**Emotional exhaustion.** “Emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of psychic energy or the draining of emotional resources” (Anbar & Eker, 2007, p. 15). Emotional stress and burnout cause great damage to the mental and physical states of the human body. This physical and mental harm is the result of feeling anxious, tense, frustrated, and angry for extended periods of time with no alleviation (Kim, 2005). Emotional
exhaustion can be seen as the overuse or overwhelming of one’s emotions through extensive demands from others, leading to a feeling of barrenness in which the individual can no longer continue meeting the demands (Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Jaffe-Gill & Larson, 2007). Once emotional exhaustion sets in, individuals no longer value involvement in professional and personal events (Kim, 2005). Teachers who suffer from burnout no longer have a drive and passion for teaching. Daily routines simply turn into an attempt to just go through the motions and get through the day as soon as possible (Schwab, 1983). This loss of passion, drive, motivation, and seriousness of work results in poor teaching practices, which ultimately results in poor student performance and low achievement (Anbar & Eker, 2007; Botwinik, 2007; Godt, 2006; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

**Depersonalization.** Depersonalization results from prolonged stress that has led to burnout. This result of burnout causes individuals, teachers, and professionals to wish they can be left alone and have no other persons interact with them (Hamann & Gordon, 2000). Individuals suffering from depersonalization become unresponsive to other people’s needs. Depersonalization causes negative, detached, calloused, and dehumanizing actions toward other individuals for no reason (Anbar & Eker, 2007). Depersonalization can cause individuals to feel little or no self-worth, leading to feelings of reduced personal accomplishments, with no desire to accomplish job-related tasks and assignments (Hamann & Gordon, 2000). Depersonalization in teachers is critical to student achievement. If teachers are lacking the desire to professionally accomplish their jobs, students will fail and student achievement will be inadequate (Dworkin, 2001; Wood & McCarthy, 2002). Teachers who suffer from burnout tend to develop cynical
attitudes toward students exhibiting behaviors including making derogatory comments, using extreme sarcasm, paying little to no attention to students needs, and experiencing a breakdown in communication (Anbar & Eker, 2007; Schwab, 1983). All of this leads to poor teaching practices, resulting in low and inadequate achievement (Dworkin, 2001; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

**Decreased professional/personal accomplishments.** Individuals face numerous stressors in their daily lives. These stressors, if experienced over a long period of time or at a frequent rate, will turn into burnout. The effects of burnout vary from person to person depending on their situation and experiences. Burnout decreases job performance, job satisfaction, job commitment, and quality of service. Burnout increases absenteeism, low morale, and job turnover (Anbar & Eker, 2007). All these signs and symptoms are related to burnout and to a decreased feeling of professional and personal accomplishments. Teachers who feel over-stressed or burned out lack the drive to professionally develop or personally accomplish goals. It is a cycle; teachers who lack drive to accomplish personal goals and professional development are at greater risk for developing burnout (Anbar & Eker, 2007). As part of a continuum, the three components are interrelated and grow from one another. The continuum theory starts with emotional exhaustion, which leads to depersonalization, that is then manifested through decreased professional and personal accomplishments.

**Teacher Burnout**

Wood and McCarthy (2002) applied the research and theories of Selye, Fruedenberger, and Maslach to stress and burnout of teachers. According to Wood and McCarthy, teachers who suffer from burnout (teacher burnout) lack the drive,
and desire to effectively educate students to a high standard. Dworkin (2001) stated that teacher burnout is a problem associated with the mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion of teachers working in stressful situations. Fisher (2011) stated teacher burnout is also described as a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for teaching that will ultimately lead to poor teaching practices, thus leading to poor student achievement.

Teacher burnout develops as the culmination of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased professional/personal accomplishments applied to teachers. Understanding this culmination if paramount to understanding the construct of teacher burnout. Teacher burnout is the culmination of the same three components, but specifically found in teachers. This then results in the need to discover what factors cause that continuum pattern to occur among teachers? The question to be answered is: what causes teachers to become emotionally exhausted to the extent that it ultimately results in teacher burnout?

Maslach, McCarthy, Wood, and several other authors suggested that teacher burnout must be explained in a logical (cause-effect) manner. Dworkin (2001) suggested defining teacher burnout is a pivotal primary step to establishing effective research on teacher burnout. Yong and Yue (2007) suggested identifying key elements that cause (or lead) to teacher burnout is critical to any research on the topic. Anbar and Eker (2007) stated discovering the effects of teacher burnout is the most important aspect to understanding the phenomenon; the effects of teacher burnout on teachers is what mostly impacts student success levels. Fisher (2011) stated preventing teacher burnout and supporting teachers suffering from burnout is important to student success. DiPaola and Hoy (2008) touched upon how important it is for administration to support teachers in
their professional and personal growth, and supportive administration will result in effective teaching, thus resulting in student success. The literature review for this study on teacher burnout is organized in a logical (cause and effect) approach. This literature review is structured in the following way:

1. Burnout Defined
2. Causes of Teacher Burnout
3. Effects of Teacher Burnout
4. Prevention of Teacher Burnout

**Burnout Defined**

**Burnout.** Freudenberger (1974) wrote that feelings of burnout are the results of excessive demands, insufficient rewards for effort put forth, and relationships within the work environment. Dworkin (2001) wrote that burnout can also be seen as a loss of power and create feelings of isolation, meaningless daily routines, and estrangement. Burnout has also been defined as a mental or psychological disconnection or breakaway from work or professional interests (Maslach, 1976; Seidman & Zager, 1987). Dworkin (2001) also described burnout as mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion of employees in stressful situations. Wood and McCarthy (2002) described burnout as a loss in idealism and enthusiasm for work duties.

Burnout has also been defined as a disease or syndrome often present in caregivers, social service employees, nurses, and hospital staff and is frequently present in teachers (Hellhammer & Kirschbaum, 1999). Burnout has proven to lead to negative physical symptoms throughout the body and mind, including “mental and physical exhaustion, fatigue, headaches, nonspecific pain throughout the body, disrupted sleep
patterns, reduced attention span, feelings of meaningless, apathy, detachment for work, loss of and a strong desire to quit” (Hellhammer & Kirschbaum, 1999, p. 197).

Hellhammer and Kirschbaum (1999) also wrote about the similarities in the connection between burnout and psychosomatic disorders such as “chronic fatigue syndrome, stress disorder and behavioral disorder conditions” (p. 197).

Block (1978), Freudenberger (1983), and Mo (1991) all wrote about three common symptoms that help define burnout, physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms. Physical symptoms of burnout could include lingering colds or the flu. Physical symptoms also include frequent, long-lasting headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, weight loss, and shortness of breath. Physical burnout also includes feelings of being tired, with vague aches and pains throughout the entire body (Mo, 1991). Psychological symptoms of burnout include erratic mood swings, irritability, personal depression, loss of caring for others, cynical attitude, increased frustration, and feeling helpless. Drug and alcohol abuse are also linked to psychological symptoms of burnout. Psychological symptoms of burnout also lead to anxiety and a feeling of hopelessness (Mo, 1991). Behavioral burnout includes frequently “clockwatching,” stereotyping students, and avoiding interactions with co-workers and family. These behavioral symptoms of burnout include a decline in work performance and increased absenteeism (Mo, 19991).

Schwab (1983) wrote that burnout has no real formal psychiatric status, that it is a mixture of many different stressors. Schwab (1983) also stated that people who have had long-term involvement within intensive, emotionally charged atmospheres are more likely to suffer from burnout and will develop the symptoms of emotional exhaustion, a
negative outlook on life and work, loss of feeling accomplished, and intense anger toward others for no apparent reasons. Freudenberger and North (1985) wrote that burnout is actually and literally the wearing down and wearing out of energy from the mind, body, and soul. According to Jaffe-Gill and Larson (2007), burnout occurs in three main stages. The three stages are outlined in Figures 3-5.

Figure 3. Stage 1 burnout.
Figure 4. Stage 2 burnout.
Nagy (2006) wrote of the three-stage development of burnout and stated that supporting victims of burnout during stages one and two is the most critical because stage three is potentially life threatening. Anbar and Eker (2007) also stated burnout occurs in three main stages with the third stage being the most dangerous because the desire to commit suicide is prevalent in victims. Nagy (2006) stated burnout is a serious ailment manifested in employees in a variety of professions, including the teaching profession.

**Causes of Teacher Burnout**

According to Wood and McCarthy (2002), teachers who suffer from burnout lack the drive, motivation, and desire to effectively educate students to a high standard.
Dworkin (2001) stated teacher burnout is a problem associated with the mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion of teachers working in stressful situations. Fisher (2011) stated teacher burnout is also described as a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for teaching that will ultimately lead to poor teaching practices, thus leading to poor student achievement. The following sections are devoted to discovering the causes of burnout among teachers.

**Organizational structure of schools and burnout.** Numerous organizational structural problems plague America’s schools and the teachers who teach in them. These problems include, but are not limited to, poor professional relationships with co-workers, work overload, too many “adjunct” (non-educational) duties, lack of support and lack of resources (Yong & Yue, 2007). A lack of power and limited autonomy in the daily routine of teachers is also stated to cause teacher burnout (Yong & Yue, 2007). It is also stated that strict timeline deadlines, ineffective educational reform, role conflict, role ambiguity, poor school facilities, poor school culture, and formal evaluations are all sources of burnout among teachers (Yong & Yue, 2007).

Organizational time constraints leave teachers with a lack of time to perform tasks crucial to their job performance, thus causing significant stress that leads to emotional exhaustion (Chen & Miller, 1997). Limited time constraints added to intense workloads have proven to be a source of stress and emotional exhaustion among teachers (Chen & Miller, 1997). Excessive red tape and pointless paperwork contributes greatly to a lack of motivation, morale, commitment, and job satisfaction (Yong & Yue, 2007).

Income and funding is an organizational factor that has often been a focal point of conflict for school districts across America. Eggers (2011) pointed out that 46% of
teachers leave the profession within five years and salary is the reason for it. Eggers (2011) also pointed out that the average starting salary for teachers is $39,000 and that 62% of teachers have a second job. A lack of funding and low salaries for teachers is a direct link to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Eggers, 2011). Chen and Miller (1997) also analyzed financial factors of stress and found that nine similar studies all resulted in the same result; teachers do feel more stressed when they feel their salary is inadequate. This feeling of financial inadequacy results in low morale, low motivation, and a decline in performance (Chen & Miller, 1997; Eggers, 2011).

Another source of teacher stress in schools across America is the organizational issue of class sizes. According to Langan-Fox and Cooper (2011), class sizes and overcrowded classrooms do lead to emotional exhaustion, physical exhaustion, stress, and burnout among teachers. Over-crowded classes lead to low morale and increased stress because of the following: little or no one-on-one interaction with students depletes teachers’ passion. A lack of physical space for movement or kinesthetic lessons leads to boring lessons that are not student-centered. Complex seating arrangements that limit student and teacher movement and personal interactions result in a disconnect from students, resulting in a diminishing feeling of accomplishment, morale, and job performance (Langan-Fox & Cooper, 2011).

Organizational rigidity leaves teachers stuck in a groove of routine and formalized work patterns with little or no autonomy that will result in teacher burnout (Fisher, 2011). Politicians, district officials, and school leaders need to organize school structures that properly meet the needs of teachers. The needs that must be met include creative autonomy, class space, funding, proper pay, and leadership roles for teachers (Langan-
The organization of schools should be designed to efficiently and effectively meet the needs of all school stakeholders. School programs should be created and focused on realistic goals and objectives (Yong & Yue, 2007). Schools should also be organized in a manner by which teachers have a major influence and are part of the decision-making process (Dworkin, 2001; Maslach & Schaufeli, 2001). School organizational structures are likely not to change without government reform. With this being said, it is very important to understand that the more teachers are involved in the overall organization and decision-making process of a school, the less likely stress and burnout will occur (Black, 2004; Dick & Wagner, 2001; Nagy, 2006; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

**Lack of resources and burnout.** Throughout education, there is a common factor leading to teacher stress that will always be constant: lack of resources and materials (Langan-Fox & Cooper, 2011). Teachers have always been burdened with the problem of not having sufficient materials for students and not having the resources or funding to provide students with materials. These materials can range from extra sets of physical education clothing to paper for an art class (Nickerson & Deenihan, 2003).

In numerous case-studies analyzed by Alverez and Kaufhold (2006), they found that teachers who have little to no funding for common classroom items suffer from high levels of burnout and a lack of resources and supplies is a primary contributor to the factors that cause burnout among teachers. Chen and Miller (1997) found teachers all across the tenure track find a lack of resources as a major stressor; this included primary, secondary, college, and university teachers and faculty. A lack of resources and materials can quickly overcome teachers’ passion, motivation, and drive (Langan-Fox & Cooper,
Alvez and Kaufhold (2006) added that due to financial constraints, teachers across America are forced into purchasing supplies and materials with their own out-of-pocket finances with no reimbursement. This financial burden and monetary stress with which teachers are forced to deal are direct links to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

**Role ambiguity and burnout.** According to *Principals Improving Instruction: Supervision, Evaluation, and Professional Development* (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008), defining a teacher’s job role and duties is paramount to the mental health of teachers; the principal is in charge of defining these roles for teachers. DiPaola and Hoy (2008) stated that when professional roles are not defined, teacher performance standards and teaching objectives become forgotten and go unused. The lack of teaching standards results in lowered expectations and performance, thus resulting in role ambiguity for teachers. Ghorpade (2011) defined teacher role ambiguity as the lack of understanding and expectations for one’s teaching job and duties in performance. Friedlander and Olk (1992) wrote that role ambiguity arises when teachers are faced with expectations requiring performance behaviors oppositional to their own performance behaviors.

Um and Harrison (1998) wrote that role ambiguity leads to emotional anxiety and tension that can lead to burnout. They also touched upon the idea that fear and pressure from revealing confusion to a supervisor will result in negative perceptions. Wood and McCarthy (2002) wrote that teacher role ambiguity and uncertainty about professional roles has been linked to an increase in teacher turnover (burnout and stress). Teachers are unsure of what expectations and requirements they are to meet in hopes of becoming a “good teacher.” As trainees, interns, and new teachers gain experience and confidence, the degree of role ambiguity may lessen because behavioral expectations and the
evaluation process have become clear, defined, and accessible (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). Maslach and Schaufeli (2001) wrote it is ultimately the responsibility of the site leader (principal) to communicate and present performance standards, expectations, and professional roles for teachers. This will address and prevent role ambiguity among teachers. Haycock (2001) stated that successful and effective teachers have specific defined roles within their teaching assignments.

**Formal evaluations and burnout.** The need for formal evaluation stems from *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and No Child Left Behind (2002) in an attempt to create quality personnel evaluations by which teacher quality is measured (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). The overall purpose of the teacher evaluation process as examined in *Principals Improving Instruction: Supervision, Evaluation, and Professional Development* is to achieve student success through aiding teachers to become highly qualified teachers who are effective in their teaching practices and development (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008).

The goal of formal evaluations is to prepare teachers for success, but oftentimes are the source of stress and emotional exhaustion (Fisher, 2011); it is important to note that teacher performance is directly linked to student performance (Wood & McCarthy, 2002). With so much hanging on formal evaluations, it is clear to see how these evaluations can cause stress. Formal evaluations require a heightened urgency and extra preparation and planning for teachers; this is their opportunity to showcase their passion and skill sets. This heightened urgency to prepare for formal evaluations is noted to be a factor in the development of stress on teachers (Tornero & Taut, 2010). The largest groups of teachers who suffer from stress due to evaluations are non-tenured teachers.
(Tornero & Taut, 2010). Formal evaluations take place two to three times a year for non-tenured teachers (Gordon, 1995), creating ample opportunities to experience emotional stress and anxiety.

Formal teacher evaluations are one of the most important parts to an administrator’s job function. The formal evaluation process is an essential component of educational leadership and is important to the professional development of young, non-tenured teachers. These evaluations are stressful, intense, and mean so much to teachers because they oftentimes determine tenure status (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). Formal evaluations take place using specific protocols, planning, and meetings. DiPaola and Hoy (2008) provide a visual representation of the protocol tied to the formal evaluation cycle that most, if not all, teachers must go through (see Figure 6).
Figure 6. Teacher evaluation cycle.

Teacher relationships with administrators and burnout. According to DiPaola and Hoy (2008), “the most important work a principal does as a supervisor, is working with teachers to facilitate their professional growth and development” (p. 126). Administrators need to present themselves to teachers as leaders who have managerial tasks, not managers who lead. Often, administrators focus on the managerial tasks and lose faith from teachers due to the lack of communication and collegial relationships (Dunford, 2007). Teacher disconnects and teacher stress occur when administrators disengage from teachers and neglect to consult with teachers on a variety of critical school matters. These critical matters include staffing, course development, curriculum development, instructional planning, financial issues, job roles and school planning (Dunford, 2007; Schlichte & Merbler, 2005). When communication, transparency, and
teamwork break down between administrators and teachers, stress and conflict will occur (Dunford, 2007). This conflict may result in teachers having a lack of confidence and respect for the administration and build a negative climate among teachers. This negativity will result in emotional stress, resulting in burnout (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Dunford, 2007).

Politics and burnout. Governmental regulations, mandates, and policies hinder the freedom and creativity schools and school districts all across America (Folly, 2007). Although many political policies do support education, educators have long stated that politics and political policies have no business in education; education policy should be driven and created by educators, no politicians (Folly, 2007). Too often, policies and regulations are created by political interests backed by cooperate interests, not student interests (Folly, 2007). Political influence on education issues has long been a source of frustration for teachers and educators.

School reform and burnout: A Nation at Risk.

Nearly a quarter century ago, A Nation at Risk (1983) hit schools like a brick dropped from a penthouse window. One problem: the landmark document that still shapes our national debate on education was misquoted, misinterpreted, and often dead wrong. (Ansary, 2007, p. 1)

A Nation at Risk set off a never-ending wave of educational reforms that have all failed schools, students, parents, tax payers and the nation as a whole (Serwach, 2003). In April 1983, a report called A Nation at Risk was released by the Reagan Administration, under the U.S. Department of Education’s National Commission on Excellence (Lewis, 2006). The ultimate aim of this document was to link the country’s economic woes to the state of our schools. The context for this linking was that if
schools would improve, the economy would improve as well (Lewis, 2006). The report claimed American students were failing academically, students suffered from uneven standards, and teachers were not prepared. The report also added that national security would be highly threatened if reform was not implemented; this was one of the many plans to combat communism and the Soviets (Ansary, 2007). *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) demanded more from schools: more science classes, more math classes, more reading and writing classes, more homework, more school days, more hours, and more critical thinking.

The criticism lay in the fact that the idea being promoted by the government was not clear to the public and the implementation plan was not addressed properly (Lewis, 2006). Teachers saw *A Nation at Risk* as a reform that would lead to tunnel vision, in which the role of educators would be limited and take a back seat to economic productivity and testing as the only means of educational success (Lewis, 2006). Teachers feared they would have little to no influence on student educational needs and feared they would be simply preparing students to serve as a means to regain economic status in the global market (Lewis, 2006). This fear of insignificance caused great stress on teachers whose purpose is to be significant to their students.

**School reform and burnout: No Child Left Behind.** *No Child Left Behind* (2002) is a 1,100 page educational reform package set in to place by self-proclaimed Educator in Chief, President Bush (and his administration) after the 2000 presidential election (Ansary, 2007). *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) was a massive federal reform on education that takes educating students out of the hands of educators and into the hands
Critics of NCLB claim the aim of NCLB is to “post the curricula, test all students, and punish those who fail” (Ansary, 2007, p. 4). Teacher creativity no longer accepted, NCLB requires yearly standardized testing at massive levels. The yearly tests are measured, and schools and school districts are given progress reports and grades that determine their funding and autonomy. If schools are failing, it results in a decrease of federal funds and a status of “program improvement.” Program improvement involves cutbacks in funding, teacher staff, and administrative staff; increased observations and evaluations; loop holes; and job performance obstacles (Ansary, 2007). Program cuts such as art and physical education can result from being in a program improvement school (Rueter, 2005). Under program improvement, the school or school district can be taken over by the state government (Ansary, 2007). If a school or district is taken over, the government becomes the school board and superintendent and controls what happens at the school or district site (Ansary, 2007). This increased pressure on standardized testing and lack of academic freedom for teachers are major factors in creating emotional stress and morale loss for teachers (Ansary, 2007). The loss of control and autonomy for teachers under NCLB drastically increases the stress levels of teachers and directly results in emotional exhaustion and teacher burnout (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006; Schlichte & Merbler, 2005).

Teachers are the only ones who can really understand the progress individual students are making and offer students valid assessments based on building achievement. Teachers have always used best practices to educate students. Teachers use informal and
formal tools to assess student progress and being able to understand and assess students at the individual level is what creates positive relationships and builds confidence, autonomy, and success among teachers and students (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006; Schlichte & Merbler, 2005). Under NCLB, almost all autonomy is taken away from teachers and education is put into the hands of the government administrators who spend no time in the classroom and cannot understand or comprehend what it takes to properly educate and assess students (Rueter, 2005). Ansary (2007) stated, “NCLB is a bureaucratization of education and enables politicians, not educators, to control schools” (p. 4). Rueter (2005) believes NCLB “impedes education, encourages dropouts, narrows the curriculum, increases anxiety, foster academic dishonesty and does nothing to improve schools” (p. 1). Rueter also stated that NCLB takes power away from teachers, resulting directly in teacher burnout. NCLB is a factor in teachers becoming victims of burnout due to the fact that NCLB restricts curriculum and binds teachers’ hands from creativity and passion (Ansary, 2007). NCLB removed all academic freedom in teaching and turned education in to a “drill and grill business” in which little learning actually happens and memorization of testing standards is the key to success (Ansary, 2007; Rueter, 2005).

Educators across America have protested NCLB because it undermines teacher skill levels and rejects thousands of studies by professional educators who have made the connection between socioeconomic challenges and education (Ansary, 2007). Schools in highly urbanized, underfunded, poor neighborhoods are expected to achieve the same proficient and advanced test scores as their counterparts in affluent communities, even though the level of resources is drastically inequitable (Campbell, 2003). This drastic
inequitable result of federal policy has created an achievement gap in which Caucasian and Asian students perform at a much higher academic level than that of Latino, Hispanic, and African American students (Campbell, 2003). The achievement gap is reflective of socioeconomic and sociopolitical challenges in communities that are mainly Latino, Hispanic, and African American. The Bush Administration claimed NCLB was set up to close the gap between Caucasian students and students of color, and students of poverty should be able to meet the requirements of academic achievement just like their affluent counterparts (Ansary, 2007). The demands set forth by NCLB are discouraging to teachers. NCLB rejects professional education-based case studies, limits the autonomy of teachers and sets school officials up to fail. “No Child Left Behind is reducing human effectiveness in education to paper, pencil and marking ovals, we are cheapening and even destroying the fundamental inspiration that drives learning” (Henry, 2007, p. 2). Without inspiration, freedom, passion, and drive, teachers will become overly stressed out to the point that burnout will set in (Botwinik, 2007; Dworkin, 2001; Maslach, 2002).

**School reform and burnout: Race to the Top.** The Obama Administration’s first true attempt at school reform came in the form of Race to the Top (RTTT), the education reform that would offer more than $4.35 billion to school districts and schools within the United States public education system as part of the *Education Recovery Act of 2009* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The Race to the Top outlined several education reform stipulations linked to various point values; the more reforms stipulations a respective school or school district followed, the more points that school or school district would earn for the state in which it was located. The sates with the most points received funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In the document, the
funding distribution would be structured in a series of rounds, providing multiple states opportunities to participate. According to US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, “We set a very high bar for the first phase, with over $3.4 billion still available, we're providing plenty of opportunity for all other states to develop plans and aggressively pursue reform” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Reform categories (improvement stipulations) tied to points and funding includes the following (U.S. Department of Education, 2010): Great teachers and leaders, state success factors, standards and assessments, general selection, turning around low performing schools, and data systems. Great teachers and leaders place a focus on principal and teacher development and accountability.

State success factors focus on raising student achievement through state programs. The standards and assessments focus on new standards, including common core and accountability testing. General selection criteria included topics such as charter schools, funding, and additional reforms. Turning around the lowest achieving schools is a stipulation that calls on districts and district officials to increase state assessment scores. Data systems to support instruction focus on technology-based best practices, projects, and assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The Race to the Top is an educational reform that promises new hope and change for the public school system in America, but just like previous reforms, the Race to the Top has weak points and flaws hindering the ability to support teachers in their quest to properly educate all students. Perhaps the most predominant critic of Race to the Top is former Assistant Secretary of Education, Diane Ravitch. According to Ravitch, in an interview with National Public Radio in 2011, the Race to the Top educational reform “is
an extension of NCLB…all bad ideas,” adding that NCLB and RTTT “are destroying our education system, blowing it up by these stupid policies and handing the schools in low-income neighborhoods over to private entrepreneurs does not, in itself, improve them.” Ravitch was referring to the increased authority and endorsement of charter schools and privatized schools by politically based corporations and interest groups (Ravitch, 2010).

Valerie Strauss, of the Washington Post, added to the sentiment of Ravitch. Strauss (2010) went on to support claims that RTTT is damaging to the education system in America. Strauss (2010) added that RTTT money cannot be used to supplement dwindling and depleting budgets that have negative impacts on teacher contracts, facilities, and instructional materials. Rather, RTTT funding must be spent within strict guidelines outlined in the Education Recovery Act; this not only limits qualified judgments by professional educators, but also serves as a glaring disillusionment and reminder that politicians do not value the unique equitable needs of respective regions, communities, districts, schools, and students who are in sensitive situations that call for discretionary spending of federal funds by leadership on the ground level where financial support is most required (Strauss, 2010). Additional criticism of RTTT includes issues of political legislative bodies and business interest groups overtaking control of local school districts with charter school formation in low-income communities, increased standardized testing, and teacher evaluations linked to student test scores (Strauss, 2010).

The criticism with RTTT in relation to the creation of charter schools is that oftentimes, charter schools are created in low-income communities with struggling schools. Business-backed legislature groups and business interest groups move in, take
over, and promise false hopes of increased success by imposing their own rules, and undermine mandates public schools must follow. At the same time, they are very selective and critical of which students may enroll, limiting special education and English language learner students, thus creating an exodus of high achieving students from public schools into the charter schools, resulting in a depletion of funding due to low and decreasing enrollment (Strauss, 2010).

In addition to supporting the growth of private and charter schools, RTTT increases funding for high-stakes standardized testing focused on a “drill and test” mentality; the testing undermines creativity, motivation, passion, and requires teachers to “teach to the test.” According to Strauss (2010), RTTT cuts funding from art programs, physical education programs, and social science programs, and increases funding for test preparation materials aimed at solely supporting test results that determine funding. Perhaps the most controversial, heated, and contested policy proposed by RTTT is teacher evaluations directly linked to student test scores. Educators, teachers, and policymakers who oppose this proposal state there are too many uncontrollable and unseen factors that can result in poor performance by students on standardized tests (Strauss, 2010).

**Individual characteristics and burnout.** Several classical studies link teacher burnout with individual characteristics, including age, marital status, and gender. DeFrank and Stroup (1989) found that younger, inexperienced teachers reported more stress and burnout than tenured teachers. This claim was supported years later by Fisher (2011) who also stated that non-tenure teachers suffer more stress than tenured teachers.
Younger, non-tenured teachers also reported to have less commitment and a feeling of little to no power in the school structure (Farber, 1984).

Single teachers do experience more stress than teachers who are married or in a committed relationship (Fong & Lin, 1994), stated to be a direct correlation to teacher burnout. Teachers without a support system, significant other, or mentor suffer stress and burnout at a higher rate (Dworkin, 2001; Yong & Yue, 2007). Personal and professional emotional and mental support does help prevent teacher burnout; this is due to social construction and the need to interact with others on a daily basis (Rosales, 2011).

According to McCormick and Solman (1992), female teachers experience higher levels of stress and burnout than their male counterparts. McCormick and Solman (1992) also found that female teachers at the primary level find more job satisfaction and suffer less stress and burnout than female teachers teaching at the secondary level.

**Effects of Burnout**

**Lasting impact.** Individuals face numerous stressors in their daily lives. If experienced over a long period of time or at a frequent rate, stressors will result in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a pattern of decreased professional and personal accomplishments that culminates in burnout (Plous, 2011). Teacher burnout leads to a decrease in job performance, job satisfaction, job commitment, and quality of service from teachers (Ullrich, Lambert, & McCarthy, 2010). According to Anbar and Eker (2007), teachers who suffer from burnout exhibit increased absenteeism from work, express low morale, and experience high job turnover rates. Teacher burnout leaves individuals with the inability to make complicated, critical decisions or prioritize critical
aspects of their professional and personal lives and leads to erratic behavior (Jaffe-Gill & Larson, 2007; Nagy, 2006).

Irritability with students, extreme sarcasm, avoiding students, and increased irrational student discipline are all effects of burnout in relation to student-teacher relationships (Nagy, 2006). Nagy (2006) uses extensive research and data collection to compose a list of possible signs of burnout in an individual. These signs include working harder to get less done, feeling discouraged and indifferent, showing major resistance to change, feeling a sense of failure when there is no failure, and avoiding others (professional and personal). Postponing meetings, high levels of absenteeism, inability to concentrate, and apathy, consequently resulting in poor teaching practices and low student performance and achievement are also results of teacher burnout (Nagy, 2006).

**Emotional exhaustion and burnout.** Emotional exhaustion can be described as a cause and result of burnout (Atkinson, 2005; Plous, 2011). Anbar and Eker (2007) describe emotional exhaustion as a “depletion of psychic energy or the draining of emotional resources” (p. 15). Emotional stress and burnout damages the mental and physical state of the human body quietly and is the result of feeling anxious, tense, frustrated, and angry overtime (Kim, 2005). Emotional exhaustion can be seen as the overuse or overwhelming of one’s emotions through extensive demands for others that leads to a feeling of barrenness in which the individual can no longer continue the demands of work (Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Jaffe-Gill & Larson, 2007).

Once emotional exhaustion sets in, individuals are no longer able to value involvement in professional and personal events (Kim, 2005). Teachers who suffer from burnout no longer have the drive and passion for teaching, and their daily routine simply
turns into an attempt to just go through the motions to get through the day as soon as possible (Schwab, 1983). Such loss of passion, drive, and motivation and the seriousness of work results in poor teaching practices. The result of poor teaching practices ultimately results in poor student performance and low achievement (Anbar & Eker, 2007; Botwinik, 2007; Godt, 2006; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

**Behavioral burnout.** Anbar and Eker (2007) deeply examined burnout and the consequences of extended emotional and psychological stress. They found that burnout causes symptoms that impede behavior and alter normal actions. They added that behavioral burnout symptoms include, for example, difficulty in interpersonal relationships, inability to concentrate on a subject, over sensitivity, getting angry easily, withdrawal, crying easily, carelessness, feelings of guilt, role ambiguity, mocking behaviors, increased tendency to use alcohol, postponing duties or tasks, resisting changes, and an increase of work-related accidents. Anbar and Eker (2007) wrote that behavioral burnout among teachers negatively impacts students and teaching practices will greatly suffer from the results of behavioral burnout. Teachers experiencing behavioral burnout experience negative results in their efforts to educate students. Behavioral burnout causes teachers to call in sick at a higher rate, transfer sites at a higher rate, quit the teaching profession at higher rates, and highly increases the rates of alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and family conflict (Anbar & Eker, 2007; Godt, 2006; Schwab, 1983; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

**Depersonalization and burnout.** Depersonalization results from prolonged emotional exhaustion (Sierrra-Siegert, 2007). Individuals suffering from depersonalization become unresponsive to other people’s needs. Depersonalization
causes negative, detached, calloused, and dehumanizing actions toward other individuals for no apparent reason (Anbar & Eker, 2007). Depersonalization can cause individuals to feel little or no self-worth, leading to feelings of reduced personal accomplishments with no desire to accomplish job-related tasks and assignments (Hamann & Gordon, 2000).

Teacher depersonalization results in negative feelings toward working with others (Hamann & Gordon, 2000). This negative feeling toward working with others is critical to student achievement. Teachers who fail to professionally collaborate with others fail to accomplish their job duties; this includes educating students (Dworkin, 2001; Wood & McCarthy, 2002). Teachers who suffer from emotional exhaustion will develop personal depersonalization and cynical attitudes toward students that include behaviors such as using derogatory comments and extreme sarcasm, paying little to no attention to students’ needs, and a breakdown in communication (Anbar & Eker, 2007; Schwab, 1983). Depersonalization directly leads to poor teaching practices that do result in low and inadequate student achievement (Dworkin, 2001; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

Physical and health results of stress (burnout). Kim (2005) stated teacher burnout can be crippling to the physical wellbeing of those suffering from the phenomenon. Chronic and unfocused pain, insomnia, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, extreme anger, physical conflict, heart disease, migraines, stomach aches, and back pain are all results of the physical toil of burnout on the human body (Anbar & Eker, 2007; Jaffe-Gill & Larson, 2007; Kim, 2005; Nagy, 2006). Figure 7 is a representation of the negative effects of stress on the human body.
Varughese et al. (2008) states that burnout can severely damage the human body and inflict life-long negative effects that are life-threatening. It is important to understand that the human body reacts to daily stress from work, relationships, and personal conflicts just as it would react to extreme fear or physical threat. Stress actually changes the body’s biochemical state and creates an imbalance of chemicals in the bloodstream (Varughese et al., 2008). The human brain contains a specialized ability to release chemicals into the body when faced with great risk and stress; these chemicals give humans the ability to escape from potentially dangerous or life-threatening situations (Sternberg, 2000). The chemical reaction is part of the endocrine system within the human body. The endocrine system consists of glands found throughout the human body and is responsible for three chemicals released into the human body when extreme stress
or danger occurs. The three chemicals are corticotrophin (CRH), adrenocorticotrophic (ACTH), and corticosteroids (Sternberg, 2000). The brain triggers the release of these chemicals to provide the body with the energy and fuel to escape threatening situations that could result in physical harm (Sternberg, 2000). When these extra chemicals enter the bloodstream and do not get used up or burned off, the chemical imbalance makes the human body susceptible to mental, emotional, and physical illness (Varughese et al., 2008). The extra chemicals in the bloodstream either build up or are used depending on the energy exerted in response to the stressful situation. The more physical and proactive the reaction to stress is, the less likely chemicals will be harmfully stored in the body (Varughese et al., 2008).

Stress is also known to cause a major weakening of the human body’s immune system and an overall weakening of the body (Varughese et al., 2008). According to Sternberg (2000), cortisol is produced in the human body during stressful situations and causes suppression of the body’s immune response making the body and immune system weak. Stress has been linked to aiding the negative health progression of HIV and AIDS patients due to the weakening of the immune system (Varughese et al., 2008). The weakening of the immune system as a result of stress opens the human body to become very vulnerable to numerous diseases and ailments: streptococcal (strep throat), skin allergies, necrotic fasciitis (loss of muscle, fat, and skin tissue), flu, and pneumonia (Varughese et al., 2008). The human body’s entire intestinal system is controlled by the nervous system, which is directly affected by stress. In stressful situations, the body stops supplying the intestines with blood, thus creating a damaging effect resulting in ulcers or irritable bowel syndrome (Varughese et al., 2008).
Research shows stress increases headaches, migraines, back pain, and non-focused pain and fatigue throughout the body due to an imbalance of chemicals throughout the body during stressful situations. Varughese et al. (2008) included that extreme stress and burnout has life lasting and damaging effects on the fetus. Women who are pregnant and suffer from stress and burnout are more likely to pass on the symptoms of stress and burnout to the fetus; stress in pregnant women results in a blockage of blood to the uterus. Blood to the uterus and fetus is paramount to the development of the fetus. Research shows humans can predispose children to stress and behavioral problems and symptoms (Varughese et al., 2008). Figure 8 is a graphical representation of how stress negatively impacts the human body (Varughese et al., 2008).
Preventing Burnout

Preventing burnout. The prevention of teacher burnout is paramount to student success. One way teachers can ensure student achievement and a positive school-wide culture is by supporting each other and maintaining support networks (Nieto, 2007; Quinn, 2003). Teachers can unite to create support structures and mentor groups are aimed at the general welfare of co-workers. Teachers can take a pro-active approach to supporting each other in the daily grind they face. Teachers involved in such a support
structure can create a school-wide focus on preventing teacher burnout and positive school climate. Botwinik (2007) suggested the best line of defense against stress or the development of burnout is to have others who face the same conflict be support mentors. Teachers understand the needs and struggles of each other’s problems the best and, ultimately, teachers are prepared to provide the best support (Botwinik, 2007). Teachers must work hand-in-hand to implement and develop a comprehensive, multilevel, and cohesive structure in which co-workers and teachers work in a cooperative and collaborative fashion to support each other in effort to successfully educate students (Botwinik, 2007; Maslach, 1976).

Administrative support and prevention of burnout. According to DiPaola and Hoy (2008) the school site administration must be responsible for creating a healthy school climate for all teachers. Teachers need to feel like they are valued stakeholders and their needs are being met with equity and a sense of urgency (Nieto, 2007). Administrators carry a plethora of pressure on their shoulders when it comes to the need to develop and support teachers in growing and achieving as professionals. Administrators serve as coaches and support mentors for new and inexperienced teachers and serve as the medium between tenured teachers and new teaching practices and strategies (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). The more supportive and understanding administrators are with teachers, the less likely teachers will experience stress (Black, 2004; Dunford, 2007). Administrators must provide support for all teachers in a very collegial manner whereby the teacher is treated as an equal and his or her values, opinions, and voice is respected and heard (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). This collegial respect
and support will relieve stress, eliminate emotional exhaustion, and prevent burnout from becoming a factor. Administrators can greatly influence the decline of emotional exhaustion and stress among teachers by providing support and creating trust. Administration support of teachers in prevention of burnout relies on core values, morals, and the ethics a mentor has. The more genuine the support provider is, the more likely teachers will greatly benefit in coping with stressors (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Dworkin, 2001). The formal and informal relationships administrators build with teachers are critical to teacher success. Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laura, and Schley (2010) suggested informal and formal relationships are the keys to building a true and positive working relationship in which coaching and mentoring is the aim of the relationship. Senge et al. (2010) also suggested administrators take a “systems thinking approach” to tackling issues or decision making. The systems thinking approach calls for a true collaboration in which the entire staff and the entire school are included in the choices made. The systems thinking approach validates and affirms teachers as part of the school community and validates their professionalism. Any administrator would gain respect and support from using a systems thinking approach; this will directly translate to teachers having confidence in the leadership of the school, thus resulting in feelings of pride and motivation (Senge et al., 2010). Teachers must feel they are a major part of the overall school structure and decision-making process. The more important teachers are and feel, the less likely they will be affected by emotional stress (Black, 2004; Botwinik, 2007; DiPaola & Hoy, 2008).
**Professional development and prevention of burnout.** Pre-service professional development sets the tone for the entire school year; staff members will buy-in or check out depending on the professional development being offered (Dunford, 2007). Professional development tailored to teachers’ professional needs is directly reflected in student achievement. The more useful and meaningful the professional development is to teachers’ needs, the more success students will achieve (Dunford, 2007). The best possible outcome of professional development is teacher needs being met; but oftentimes ineffective leaders select random “flavor of the month” professional development (Dunford, 2007). Administrators need to know the specific needs of their teaching staff and what professional developments would best benefit individual needs (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). If professional development needs are met, emotional exhaustion and stress are less likely to be experienced (Dick & Wagner, 2001; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006).

**Teacher autonomy and prevention of burnout.** Pearson and Moomaw (2006) stated, “that empowering teachers is an appropriate starting point for education experts to solve current school problems” (p. 44). Teacher autonomy is a key point when examining teacher burnout. The less autonomy a teacher has, the more he or she will feel stressed and exhausted. The more autonomy a teacher has, the more satisfied he or she will be with his or her teaching career. Pearson and Moomaw (2006) also stated teachers should be valued as professionals and assume great autonomy; they went on to say that teachers know what is best for their students, just as medical doctors knows what is best for their patients. Teachers should be valued and empowered to prescribe treatments (in the form of best practice needs) for their students (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006).
School reform such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and No Child Left Behind (2002) have left teachers powerless with no autonomy for what really happens in the classroom. Under these reforms, teachers are no longer seen as experts who can prescribe or “tailor fit” to the educational needs of their students. Under these reforms, teachers simply teach to the test, thus eliminating any creative autonomy a teacher possesses (Ansary, 2007; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). Teachers who are able to be creative and have autonomy report much more satisfaction with the teaching profession than those who must follow rigid course guides in preparation for student standardized tests (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006).

**Professional learning communities and prevention of burnout.** According to DuFour (2004), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) offer teachers the opportunity to support each other in the development of best practices and pedagogy. A PLC offers teachers the support structure of weekly professional development meetings focused on student achievement, best practices, and group accountability (DuFour, 2004). PLCs can range in size and can consist of teachers from several departments, grade levels, and content areas. The main focus of PLCs is to share ideas on best practices in the classroom and how those best practices benefit student success. DuFour (2004) stated PLCs are the most effective strategy for teachers to make a difference in their own personal and professional development. This development will translate into self-confidence and skill building that will ultimately result in effective and motivated teachers who are well prepared to educate students to high levels of success (DuFour, 2004).
Physical exercise and prevention of burnout. Any physical activity helps reduce stress and can be an essential part of living a healthy stress-free lifestyle (Hamann & Gordon, 2000). Physical exercise can sufficiently recharge and invigorate the body, mind, and soul and could serve as effective therapy with multifaceted benefits (Conn, 2010). Jaffe-Gill and Larson (2007) stated that physical exercise can actually help prevent and greatly combat feelings of depression, anxiety, sadness, and dejection. The level and intensity of physical exercise needed to eliminate stress does vary from person to person. Conn (2010) stated the most important aspect to physical exercise and the relief of stress is to just get moving, physically. There is no need to push personal limits, or go above and beyond. The most important thing to remember when trying to reduce stress is to be active and use the body’s muscles on a regular basis (Kim, 2005). Being physically active will eliminate burn-off and use up stored up chemicals and toxins in the body created from the body’s reaction to stress and emotional exhaustion. These toxins and chemicals are associated with harmful and deadly effects on the body (Conn, 2010).

Practical burnout prevention: Tips and strategies. Stress is real, tangible, and manifested in destructive ways throughout the body, mind, and soul (Conn, 2010). Occupational stress is a part of life no matter the career or job. The most important thing an individual can do is be aware of stress prevention strategies and practices. Practical strategies are easy, effective, and manageable; breathing deep and at a regular pace is a very easy and practical way to combat immediate stressors and actually decreases the tone of the body’s sympathetic nervous system resulting in relaxation (Kim, 2005). Spending some quiet time alone daily has been scientifically proven to facilitate a relaxation response in the body and decrease blood pressure, decrease pulse rate, and
improve blood circulation (Kim, 2005). Eating foods high in beneficial vitamins can greatly increase energy and positive feelings. Emotional health is greatly increased by consuming Vitamins B and D and Omega-3 fatty acids and can help promote physical health (Kim, 2005).

Learning to delegate power and responsibilities can greatly decrease stressors and create opportunities for others to establish themselves as productive team members who can take the burden off department chairs, site leaders, and managers (Nagy, 2006). Becoming an invested member of any staff or PLC is a great way to stay positive and full of motivation (DuFour, 2004). DuFour (2004) stated it is paramount to avoid isolation and to join others for meetings, learning opportunities, and professional development. Nagy (2006) stated that joining others for lunch and sharing stories that do not relate to work helps keep individuals motivated and fresh. Nagy (2006) also added it is healthy to find any reason to laugh. Having a life outside of work and being active in family activities is another great way to avoid the build-up of stress (Nagy, 2006). Understanding personal limitations is also important to reducing and preventing stress. Being able to say no and backing off unreasonable goals is beneficial to personal health (Nagy, 2006).

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to show how important it is to support teachers in preventing teachers from becoming emotionally exhausted to the point of burnout. This phenomenon called teacher burnout cripples healthy teachers and prevents them from educating students to high levels of success. Teachers who suffer from burnout lack the drive, motivation, and desire to effectively educate students to a high
level (Dworkin, 2001). Wood and McCarthy (2002) described teacher burnout as a loss in idealism and enthusiasm for teaching. Teacher burnout has also been defined as a disease or syndrome often present in teachers who face enormous stress and exhaustion (Hellhammer & Kirschbaum, 1999).

Numerous organizational and structural problems cause teacher burnout, including, but not limited to, poor professional relationships with co-workers, work overload, too many “adjunct” (non-educational) duties, lack of support, lack of resources, lack of power and autonomy (Dworkin, 2001), time pressure, ineffective educational reform, role conflict/ambiguity, poor school facilities, poor school culture (Wood & McCarthy, 2002), and supervisor observations and inspections (Yong & Yue, 2007). The effects of teacher burnout vary from person to person depending on their situation and experiences. The significance of this literature review is that it will help and support Valley High School teachers with a baseline of information to create and establish a support structure. Providing support structures for Valley High School teachers will help alleviate burnout. The support structure is to help Valley High School teachers participate in an action-based professional development workshop based on this literature review. Using this literature review will help put theory into action and help Valley High School teachers become motivated.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 focuses on the overall organization of the phenomenological study that took place at Valley High School. This chapter starts with a detailed description of Valley High School followed by demographic data and information on Valley High School teachers who were the focus of this study. The research details of this study on teacher burnout are also discussed in this chapter, including explanations on research design, research rationale, research methods, and data collection instruments used to gather information from Valley High School teachers. Chapter 3 concludes with ethical considerations applied to protect participants and their identities.

A detailed description of why mixed-methods research is the best possible medium for data collection and analysis on teacher burnout is provided. Chapter 3 touches on the data collection process and the data collection tools used to drive this research at Valley High School. The data collection tools are comprised of survey protocols, interview protocols, and an observation protocol. A timeline for the progress of this study is included in this chapter. The timeline includes dates and schedules for proposal hearings, Institutional Review Board (IRB) completion, a pilot study, data collection tool finalization, participant requests, data collection, data analysis, and findings and implications write up. Ethical considerations in research are also taken into account in this chapter. The IRB process is explained, as well as the participant invitation process. Most importantly, Chapter 3 explains how the research questions that
shaped and drove this study on teacher burnout were answered. Those research questions are:

1. How would teachers at Valley High School describe teacher burnout?

2. What would teachers at Valley High School say are the key contributing elements or factors that cause teacher burnout?

3. What suggestions or interventions would teachers at Valley High School provide as a means to prevent or alleviate teacher burnout?

**Site and Population**

**Site Description**

This study on teacher burnout was conducted at Valley High School. Valley High School is part of the Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD) and is located in south Sacramento, California. The EGUSD office is located in Sacramento County, in the city of Elk Grove, California. Valley High School is located on the border between the two cities, Elk Grove and Sacramento. This is unique because of the extreme differences between Elk Grove and the community of south Sacramento (see Table 1).
Table 1

*Differences Between Elk Grove and Sacramento*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Demographics</th>
<th>Sacramento</th>
<th>Elk Grove</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>$82,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: White</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: Asian</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: Hispanic</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: African American</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Valley High School has 1,632 students and of them, 418 students are identified as English Language Learners. Within the group of 418 English Language Learners, 23 different languages are spoken. In 2010, Valley High School had 79 Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program students. Valley High School has 1,500 students identified as students of poverty who received free lunch.

The student population at Valley High School mirrors the ethnic and cultural diversity of the south Sacramento community. The student population at Valley High School is a very diverse mix. In 2002, *TIME Magazine* described Sacramento as the most diverse city in America (Stodghill & Bower, 2002). The student demographics for Valley High School are illustrated in Figure 9.
Since its opening in 1977, the attendance boundary for Valley High School has shifted periodically. The boundary area includes a conglomerate of small businesses, apartments, and low-income housing. Consequently, a large number of students come from low socio-economic conditions. Over 90% of the students at Valley High School are from low socio-economically disadvantaged households (at or below the poverty level). Valley High School serves a large percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students. Currently, over 90% of the students receive a free lunch and free breakfast. Free breakfasts and free lunches are crucial to the well-being of Valley High School students who must meet a challenging academic program. Since 2001, Valley High School has seen an increase in the number of students who qualify for a free and
reduced lunch program, with a steady increase from the 2005-2006 school year (see Figure 10).

![Valley High School Free or Reduced Lunch in Student Population (％)](chart.png)

*Figure 10. Valley High School free or reduced lunch in student population.*

Valley High School has experienced a renaissance in the teaching and learning process over the last 10 years. As recommended in the 2002 Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) report, resources have been directed at improving student achievement. As of 2011, Valley High School has experienced 10 straight years of Academic Performance Index (API) improvement. California educational policy mandates that all schools should be above an API of 800. At the time of the study, Valley High School stood at an API of 740. A sustained school-wide professional learning program focused on instruction, coupled with the most comprehensive secondary English Language Learner program in the district, has helped propel student achievement in the right direction. The Elk Grove Unified School District creates BOLD
Goals on a yearly basis. These BOLD Goals are academic goals based on California State guidelines and benchmarks. The Elk Grove Unified School District BOLD Goals state: 100% of students will be “proficient” as measured by the California Standardized Test (CST); 100% of 12th graders will pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE); and 100% of students will be college and career ready.

Valley High School has managed to increase and support the achievement of some of its most needy, disadvantaged students, while at the same time expand its Advanced Placement (AP), Honors, and college-going programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). To attest to the tenacious spirit of the staff, Valley High School student’s academic achievement on the California Standardized Tests and California High School Exit Exam continues to grow despite downsizing nearly 35 teachers in the past three years. The number of students being accepted to four-year colleges is on the rise, and the staff has worked hard to stay student-centered and collaborative despite a culture of declining enrollment and human resources. Valley High School teachers are doing more than ever, with fewer resources and less funding.

Maintaining this academic success and addressing new areas of need are not only challenges but also leverage points to strengthen unity in supporting student learning. Valley High School has truly become one of the most collaborative and engaging educational environments in the EGUSD. Valley High School was once plagued by major negative climate issues and the number of staff willing to transfer has been replaced by a collegial group of teachers and educators. The staff members at Valley High School want to be at Valley High School; there is no talk or requests of transfers. The academic success of a student body that comes from 90% poverty is a motivating
factor in their decision to stay at Valley High School. The stability of the staff has allowed for the successful implementation of new programs. These initiatives and efforts have been regularly observed in visitations by schools and districts across the state. The success experienced at Valley High School is not an indication that our work is done, but a motivation to strive for even more success. The drive to ensure students are given the best opportunities for learning is palpable. Figure 11 illustrates the academic success Valley High School has sustained over the last 10 years.

![Figure 11. Valley High School API score.](chart.png)

As Valley High School celebrates academic successes, the school faces perhaps its biggest challenge to date. As a result of boundary shifts due to the opening of new schools and a traditionally mobile population, enrollment has declined from over 2,500 students in the 1998-1999 school year to about 1,600 in 2010-2011.
To combat the declining enrollment, the principals in the “Valley HI Region” are working together to promote the positive aspects of the region. In the October 2011 regional board meeting, the principals in the Valley HI Region created an action plan for increased student achievement in English and math in the hopes of retaining students within the region. Valley High School teamed up with a University of California Grant Program called Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). GEAR UP, Valley High School, the region’s middle school, and the five feeder elementary schools hosted rallies within the region. The goal and emphasis was to motivate students for college. These efforts are imperative because the Elk Grove Unified School District entered Program Improvement in the 2009-2010 school year, thus allowing all students the opportunity for open enrollment and transfer. In 2011, Valley High School lost over 100 students in the Valley HI Region due to open enrollment.

Valley High School has a discipline policy that is reviewed with students annually in Advocacy Classes. Ninth-grade students are introduced to Valley High School policy.
during orientation as well as during Advocacy at the beginning of the school year. The EGUSD publishes a *Code of Conduct Student/Parent Handbook* that covers the behavior expectations and guidelines for students as well as the consequences for violating these rules. Student discipline problems play an important role in the development of burnout among teachers. The more student discipline issues that occur, the higher the chances are for burnout development among teachers (van Tartwijk & Hammererness, 2011). Tables 2 and 3 offer statistics for student discipline at Valley High School (EGUSD, 2012b).

**Table 2**

*Summary of Expulsions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2008-2009</th>
<th>2009-2010</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

*Summary of Suspensions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2008-2009</th>
<th>2009-2010</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>598</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Site Access**

Access to Valley High School was not an issue. The study and research was conducted by an “insider” who had access to all relevant documents, data, and personnel needed for this research and study.
Population Description

All the participants in this study on teacher burnout were Valley High School teachers. The study and research methods were open to all Valley High School teachers in all subjects and grade levels. No teacher at Valley High School was restricted from volunteering for participation in this study on teacher burnout. Participants from Valley High School provided data through three data collection methods: surveys, interviews, and observation. All 78 teachers were asked to complete a survey and a small handful of teachers were interviewed and observed.

The characteristics the teachers shared is they all taught at Valley High School. All participating teachers share common experiences with the same student population, community stakeholders, and district policies, and they all share the same site administration team (supervisors, evaluators). The estimated number of participants differed depending on the data collection method. The number of participants for interviews was five; the number of teachers observed was five; and the estimated number of teachers participating in the survey was 78. All 78 teachers at Valley High School were provided with a survey via email, and 78 teachers completed one survey.

The target population for this study on teacher burnout was Valley High School teachers, but the professional development derived from this study can be applied to all teachers who teach in public schools. All public education teachers can benefit from the results of this study. Public education teachers share cultural characteristics and traits. These teachers can be found within any given school or school district. This study can also be targeted toward specific teachers who suffer from burnout symptoms and teachers who are at greater risk of experiencing burnout.
Population

Recognizing student diversity as its strength, Valley High School seeks to have a staff that reflects the student population in order to enhance the teaching and learning community as much as possible. Serving the 1,600 students is a certificated teaching staff of 78, six administrators, four counselors, one psychologist, and 14 classified employees. In addition, the site has a health clerk, a part-time language and speech pathologist, and instructional aides. The administrative team is comprised of three males and three females with the following ethnic composition: four Whites, one Latino, and one Arab American. The counseling team is comprised of two males and two females of the following ethnicities: two Whites, one Asian, and one Hispanic. Table 4 represents Valley High School teacher ethnicity.

Table 4

*Valley High School Teacher Ethnicity, 2011*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Multiple/No reply</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: California Department of Education (CDE) (2012)

Valley High School has 13 main academic content areas and one support class to help with discipline. The core academic subject matter classes in which students take standardized tests are English, math, science, and social sciences. Table 5 organizes how many female and male teachers there are in each department, as well as how many fully credentialed teachers there are in each department.
Table 5

Valley High School Teacher Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Fully Credentialed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Languages</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVID</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leadership</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR. ROTC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>78 Total Teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 78 teachers at Valley High School, 13 are non-tenured. These 13 teachers still face evaluative observations and formal evaluations that will determine tenure status in the Elk Grove Unified School District. The 13 non-tenured teachers are all serving in their first or second years as teachers at Valley High School. The tenured teacher at
Valley High School has served the longest has served 30 years, having served all 30 at Valley High School.

The majority of the teachers at Valley High School are long-serving tenured teachers who earn less than the state average for teachers’ salaries. Table 6 outlines state and district averages for teacher salaries.

Table 6

*Teacher Salary Comparison*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary Averages</th>
<th>State Average for Teacher Salary</th>
<th>EGUSD Average for Teacher Salary</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Range</td>
<td>$42,377</td>
<td>$40,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Range</td>
<td>$67,667</td>
<td>$59,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Salary</td>
<td>$87,102</td>
<td>$82,031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understanding teacher demographics, gender, tenure status, and salary range is important to this study on teacher burnout. The teacher characteristics and teacher data detailed above are all major factors that play into the development of teacher burnout. These factors, as well as others, have been included as part of the interview questions and survey items.

**Research Design and Rationale**

This study on teacher burnout consists of a mixed-methods approach: qualitative and quantitative. A mixed-methods approach best supports this study on teacher burnout, as each research method offers enormous benefits to data collection and data analysis.
Each method was examined individually to provide a detailed description of how mixed methods benefit this study on teacher burnout.

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research provides a rich and deep understanding of groups of people who share common characteristics in a specific site or work location. A qualitative approach offers the opportunity to observe Valley High School teachers in action, in their own classrooms, in their own school setting, in the actual place where teacher burnout develops. Qualitative research is organic and unique; it can be accurately conducted within a participant’s work setting or location. The researcher is part of the climate and community and is able to immerse him or herself in the participants’ work setting. In this study, the researcher was in the actual classrooms with the students and teacher. Conducting this study on teacher burnout at Valley High School, an actual school, adds richness and validation to the study (Creswell, 2009). The more a researcher can immerse him or herself into the actual setting, the more valid the results and data (Creswell, 2009).

The rationale for using a qualitative approach is that the study will help solve a human problem (Creswell, 2009), the presence of stress and burnout. Qualitative research methods are particularly used for social sciences and offer the opportunity to tap into the human element of the social sciences (education, history, culture, religion). Qualitative design also offers the opportunity to build upon findings and ask “emerging questions” (Creswell, 2009) from those findings and collected data. The emerging questions can also be described as data points (answers) that provide information that eventually expand into interpretations for solutions. In this specific case, the solutions will be how to protect teachers at Valley High School from becoming victims of burnout.
According to Ravid (2011), quantitative research methods offer numerical interpretations of a study or research project. Through quantitative methods, this study on teacher burnout at Valley High School can be expressed through numerical representations in the form of t-charts and graphs that represent mean, mode, range, variance, as well as other statistical formulas (Ravid, 2011). The difference between quantitative methods and the qualitative methods (in relation to this specific study) is that using quantitative tools is more rigid and structured in finalization (Ravid, 2011). Qualitative tools are more flexible, unique, and organic (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative methods produce results that are unique and individualized, and quantitative methods data result from a “formula” that can be adapted to multiple organizations and topics (Creswell, 2009).

The rationale for using a quantitative approach is that a numerical representation can add so much depth and understanding to a study. Understanding and using the t-charts; graphs with mean, mode, and range; and variance data can offer interpretations with no opportunity for ambiguity (Ravid, 2011). Quantitative approaches also reinforce the reliability of the study and offer a holistic approach to the research topic and problem statement (Ravid, 2011).

The distinctive qualities of each research method provide different roads to a final destination (triangulation per Creswell, 2009), adding depth, value, and increased rigor to this study on teacher burnout at Valley High School. Using a mixed-methods approach offers increased validation to the study and findings (Creswell, 2009).
Research Methods

Introduction

Qualitative research provides an opportunity to examine a phenomenon taking place and asks participants to describe that phenomenon as in this case teacher burnout. Participants (teachers) of this study at Valley High School described the phenomenon taking place in their classrooms on a daily basis through interviews and conversations. Observations also occurred to observe the phenomenon taking place in real time. Qualitative data collection tools included open-ended and semi-structured “interviews to let the participant “open up” and express all emotions, feelings, descriptions, and important thoughts (see Appendix A). Observation forms were designed to capture the moment and enable the researcher to reflect on key moments and situations (see Appendix B).

Quantitative research methods offered the opportunity for numerical data analysis for which descriptive research (survey research) was conducted. Valley High School teachers participated in a survey targeting the perceived causes of teacher burnout among Valley High School teachers. The results of the descriptive research (survey) data were analyzed and interpreted for Valley High School teachers as part of their professional development workshop (Ravid, 2011). Quantitative survey protocol items were designed by specific categories aimed to explore the causes of burnout among teachers at Valley High School (see Appendix C). Figure 13 is a visual representation of the research design as a whole, which includes researcher’s stance, methods, and data collection tools.
Figure 13. Research design.

**Stages of Data Collection**

Once final approval was granted from the Elk Grove Unified School District, the first step in data collection was to confirm interview participants. Once interviews took place, observations followed. While observations were taking place, the survey was passed out to all the teachers at Valley High School. There was hope that all 78 teachers would complete the survey. Table 7 is a schedule of proposed timelines to complete data collection and analysis.
Table 7

Research Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Finding are Established: Results and Implications</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of Each Method Used – Interview

Instrument description. The interview protocol was a semi-structured interview. The interview consisted of 6-10 questions or discussion topics. The driving force of qualitative research is to dig deep, tell the story, and not hold back. The semi-structured interview process was used to solicit emotions, feelings, and expose honesty and truth. This open-ended interview allowed participants to feel comfortable and open-up (Creswell, 2009). Using open-ended questions as part of the interview allowed
participants to share some deep emotional information and provide the researcher with data that have immense value. The more open the participants can be during the interview, the more valuable the information will be. This type of semi-structured interview allowed the participants to discuss other related topics, thus creating a “snowball” effect of emerging questions that added strength to the interview and discussion, in turn adding meaningful information to the study (Creswell, 2009).

According to Merriam (2009), this type of interview structure aligns with the research theories and styles best described as “romantic” and “neo-positive” (p. 92). It is described as romantic because the interview questions and topics ask the participant to be “self-revealing” (p. 92). Opening up in an informal interview makes it more like a conversation aimed to solicit expression and deep repressed thoughts and emotions. The neo-positive interview nature aligns with this study because the interview produced personal emotions, thoughts, feelings, and responses that were valid and real to the individual. The participant and concerns were validated. Responses are valid because they are the true and raw feelings of the participant; they are valid because the topic and questions tap into the “human element.” Tapping into that human element is at the core of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). Being able to express these emotions and feelings allowed the participant to experience a new view on their “situation” and how it affects their teaching practice, with the ultimate goal of self-reflection.

**Participant selection.** All the participants who took part in the interview on teacher burnout were Valley High School teachers. Five teachers took part in the interview protocol. Selected teachers who participated in the interview were selected using two key factors, tenure status and subject matter taught. The selected teachers
included at least one tenured teacher who had taught for over 10 years, at least one tenured teacher who taught for at least five years, and at least one non-tenured first-year teacher. The remaining teachers who participated were selected from a variety of subject matters.

**Identification and invitation.** Once the Valley High School teachers were selected for participation in the interview, the teachers were provided with a letter discussing confidentially and guidelines to the research (see Appendix D). This letter included the theme of the study, the reasons for the interview, and the intended outcomes.

**Data collection.** The interview was conducted in a face-to-face format at Valley High School, with the option to conduct the interview off-campus for those who wished. Participants were provided with the protocol prior to the interview; the protocol consisted of several items focused on a wide range of issues associated with teacher burnout. Participants were allowed to elaborate and expand on questions as they wished (emerging questions per Creswell, 2009). The structure of the interview was semi-structured and drifted between an interview and conversation. Interviews were recorded and notes were taken during the interview, which was useful for data analysis (coding for themes).

**Data analysis.** The data analysis of the interviews consisted of several elements, including transcription, coding, and thematic identification. Identifying major themes through the coding process resulted in further research and interpretations that will benefit the professional development workshop presented to teachers as a result of this study (Creswell, 2009).
Description of Each Method Used – Observation Protocol

**Instrument description.** An observation protocol was used to ensure an accurate and effective note-taking strategy. Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009) both touched upon how important it is for a researcher to take rich, descriptive, and detailed notes to help capture real moments. These moments include real-time emotions and feelings. Note taking in the field (class observations) can be described as an “on the site coding exercise” that allows for real-time reflections. Observations provide the participant an accurate and valid interpretation of what the researcher viewed and what took place. Observation notes were used to collect data on what was taking place in the classrooms of participants. The purpose of these observations was to collect data on student and teacher interactions that cause or lead to teacher burnout. There were no evaluative judgments made on the data collected as they pertained to job performance.

**Participant selection.** All the participants observed for this study on teacher burnout were Valley High School teachers. Five teachers took part in the observation protocol. Teachers who participated in the observations were selected using two key factors, tenure status and subject matter taught. The selected teachers included at least one tenured teacher who had taught for over 10 years, at least one tenured teacher who had taught for at least five years, and at least one non-tenured first-year teacher. The remaining teachers who participated were selected from a variety of subject matter classes. The teachers who were observed were the same teachers who were interviewed.

**Identification and invitation.** Once Valley High School teachers were selected for participation in the observations, they were provided with a letter discussing
confidentially and guidelines to the research (see Appendix D). This letter included the theme of the study, the reasons for the observations, and the intended outcomes.

**Data collection.** The observations (observation protocol) were conducted in the format described as a classroom visit. Participants were provided with the protocol prior to the visits; the protocol consisted of spaces for observation notes and reflections. The researcher simply visited the classrooms of the Valley High School teachers who agreed to participate in this portion of the study. Observation notes consisted of on-the-spot, in-progress notes of interactions between students and their teachers. Observation notes correlated with literature and interview coding notes to solidify major themes of burnout among Valley High School teachers.

**Data analysis.** The observations that took place at Valley High School were coded. The coding exercise allowed for identification and discovery of major themes or topics that caused burnout among teachers at Valley High School (Creswell, 2009). These coding themes are correlated with interview codes and literature reviewed; this correlation supports the development of a professional development workshop aimed at supporting Valley High School teachers by identifying major themes of burnout among Valley High School teachers.

**Description of Each Method Used – Descriptive Research (Survey Protocol)**

**Instrument description.** A survey protocol provided participants at Valley High School the opportunity to answer questions and give opinions. These questions and opinions are based on emotional, physical, and mental characteristics associated with the causes of teacher burnout. The survey included an 11-item structure providing ample opportunity for data collection without overwhelming the participants (see Appendix C).
The survey provided participants with the opportunity to share information on what they perceived to cause teacher burnout. The survey was designed to give teachers a voice and also to provide the researcher with an accurate measurement of attitudes (Merriam, 2009). The survey (just like all other data collection tools in this study) had an objective and goal aimed to increase the epistemology of teacher burnout (Creswell, 2009). The data collected from the survey provide important information toward the development of the professional development workshop aimed at preventing burnout among teachers.

**Participant selection.** All the participants who took part in the survey for this study on teacher burnout were Valley High School teachers. The estimated number of participants that would complete the survey was expected to range from 50-78. The survey was electronically passed out to every teacher at Valley High School, all 78 of them, with the assumption that all 78 would complete the survey. Seventy-eight teachers completed the survey.

**Identification and invitation.** Once Valley High School teachers were selected for their participation in the survey, they were provided with a letter discussing confidentially and guidelines to the research (see Appendix D). This letter included the theme of the study, the reasons for the survey, and the intended outcomes.

**Data collection.** The survey was completed by Valley High School teachers on their own personal time. Once teachers completed the survey, they had the option to contact the researcher to pick it up, or they could simply place it in the researcher’s mailbox. The mailbox was located in the front office next to other staff mailboxes.
**Data analysis.** Using analysis methods adapted from Maslach (1996), the survey on teacher burnout was analyzed for scores. Each survey was scored. The higher the number for a teacher, the greater the risk for developing teacher burnout. The complete survey score set was analyzed to provide information for statistical representation for a final t-chart and graphical representations that will support the development of a professional development workshop. Survey results were collected, analyzed; they are presented by survey item in Appendix E.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study on teacher burnout at Valley High School used teachers as participants. The participants were interviewed, took part in completing a survey, and were observed in their classrooms. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was sought and received prior to the data being collected. This was to protect participants and ensure safe research practices. Once IRB approval was granted, participants were selected using a wide range of specifications (noted in prior sections) and participants (Valley High School teachers) were given cover letters attached to each data collection protocol outlining the study rational and intended outcomes. Through the letters, participants were assured their privacy and personal information was protected. This research and study did not cause any intended harm or physiological or mental strain. Pseudonyms were used when conducting a final write-up. All expended data collected were held in a secure location. Data collected were destroyed once the study was complete. Paper documents pertaining to the study that included actual names were shredded and recycled. Computer files that included personal and professional information on participants were deleted. Emails between participants and the researcher were deleted and a deep clean on the
computer system took place. Disposal and destruction of these files took place in July 2012. Every measure was taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants.
Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to discover how Valley High School teachers described the onset, manifestation, development, and effects of the phenomenon known as teacher burnout. Valley High School teachers were sought out and engaged to help examine and dissect teacher burnout as it related to them on personal and professional levels. Valley High School teachers were also asked to share their personal thoughts on possible curative and preventative solutions to combat the onset of teacher burnout. Through this discovery process, Valley High School teachers took part in a survey application, interviews, and classroom observations.

Teacher survey items were developed and created on the concept of causality. The cause and effect relationship between factors and phenomenon discovery is what this study is about: what factors, or stressors, lead to the phenomenon of teacher burnout. This study engaged a large significant and substantial sample, which granted the research data collection on a large wide variety of teachers at Valley High School, teachers who had a wide range of experiences and personal perspectives. This wide-range data collection on Valley High School teachers with varied experiences provides depth and value to the study, bringing value and validation to the survey items and responses. Out of the 78 teachers at Valley High School, 78 responded to the survey, thus resulting in a 100% response rate. Of the 78 survey responses, three surveys were completed by teachers whose age ranged from 28-30 years old. Of the 78 surveys completed, 30 surveys were completed by teachers in the age range of 31-40. The largest number of
surveys completed came from Valley High School teachers in the 41-50 age range, with a total of 40 surveys completed. Five surveys were completed from teachers in the age range of 51-60.

Of the 78 Valley High School teachers, five teachers volunteered and participated in interviews. The five Valley High School teachers who participated in the interviews were asked open-ended, semi-structured questions that yielded valuable results. The five face-to-face interviews lasted from 45 to 70 minutes in length. The teachers who participated in the interviews were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. The combined teaching experience of the teachers who participated in the interview process of this study totaled over 72 years of teaching knowledge, all in public schools. Teacher interviews were transcribed and a coding process took place requiring the transcribed interviews to be deeply examined and read several times with great attention to reoccurring themes associated with the causes, cures, and prevention of teacher burnout. Saldana’s (2009) “codes-to-theory” model for interview coding was used to code key phrases, statements, and notes to create categories. Categories were then combined to create themes, which ultimately lead to findings supporting answering the research questions. An example of the coding model used is provided below (Saldana, 2009).

Classroom observations were conducted to collect data points and numerical statistics of class incidents that resulted in negative student behavior in which the teacher was required to stop whole class instruction. Classroom observation notes were analyzed to produce data that pointed out instances or situations in which interactions between teachers and students are contentious or negative. The negative teacher-student relationship incidents where charted and organized by teacher and a statistical measure
was noted for each occurrence between the teacher and student(s). The data collected in these observations highlighted how teacher and student interactions may result in stress for teachers.

The data collected from the surveys, interviews, and observations were respectively analyzed and combined to provide answers to the research questions presented. According to Creswell (2009), this analysis and combination of data from three different collection tools provided the study with three distinctive roads to one destination, which, in the end, results in significant triangulation offering a convergence of ideas, corroboration of themes, and a true validation of not only data collected, but of questions used to obtain the data. The themes that emerged from this study are categorized into two respective “burnout factors:” internal burnout factors and external burnout factors.

Internal burnout factors are factors (or causes) that take place within the actual boundaries of the school site, physically within the classrooms and offices of the school site. These internal burnout factors can be greatly influenced, positively or negatively, by the stakeholders within the school site, stakeholders that include teachers and administrators. The internal factors (or findings) discovered and revealed through this study include the following: autonomy levels for teachers, formal evaluations, student behavior, teacher workloads, and leadership roles and responsibilities for teachers.

External burnout factors are factors (or causes) that take place within the political system, within government agencies and governing body gatherings. These external burnout factors cannot be influenced by school site stakeholders such as teachers and administrators, rather they are influenced by government reform, political campaigns, and
voting elections. These external factors (or findings) that have been discovered and revealed through this study include the following: funding allocation, budget cuts, and standardized testing.

**Findings**

**Internal Burnout Factors**

**Valley High School teachers do suffer from teacher burnout.** This study on teacher burnout at Valley High Scholl included 11 survey items. The first item asked Valley High School teachers, specifically, if they were in a state of complete burnout. Nearly one-fourth (24%) of all Valley High School teachers affirmed they were experiencing complete burnout. According to Valley High School teacher firsthand statements, burnout (teacher burnout) includes the collective sentiments of “a lost passion for teaching,” “just no passion anymore,” “not wanting to come to work,” “I feel fatigued,” “just not into it (teaching) anymore,” “just biding your time until you retire or find another job,” “stressful,” and “mentally exhausted.” Valley High School Physical Education teacher “Mack” had been teaching for over 15 years and witnessed Valley High School teachers who had suffered from teacher burnout. Mack described these experiences in his own words:

> It seems to me teacher burnout happens...sometimes you see older teachers, you know, with five or six years left and you could tell they’re just not into it anymore. The way I understand burnout would be just somebody kind of like losing their thrill or the desire to come to work or to teach. I think we’ve probably all experienced it one degree or another throughout the year teaching. I can’t say that I have really gotten to the point where I felt like burned out like where I didn’t want to come to work or anything like that. But there are things here at school I’m sure you’re aware of that start to grind on your nerves after a while, that causes a teacher to become stressed to the point of burning out.
“Sue,” a Valley High School teacher who had been teaching Social Science for over 25 years, worked in private and public schools and claimed she knew teacher burnout firsthand:

I had worked for 25 years and in addition to working full time, I went to school full time. I had a family and I probably was sleeping four hours a night. My last two years I was done. I was burnout. I collapsed. I was mentally exhausted, couldn’t do anything. I fully understand burnout.

In addition to being able to describe teacher burnout firsthand, Sue was also able to describe that teacher burnout or extreme stress can develop at certain times of the year, in what she calls “seasonal burnout.”

It’s very stressful the second semester and maybe a month and a half prior to all of the state standardize testing, the start testing. So much pressure…have we examined and reviewed? Have we done this? Have we done that? What more can we do? Can you offer after-school tutoring? Can you offer lunchtime tutoring? What are you doing? Administration constantly asking you, “What else can you do? What else can you do?” And sometimes I get a little bit irritated because I feel like I’m doing the best I can delivering instruction and helping during that piece of time…they keep asking me to do more, I just get tired. I’m tired of it, yeah.

“George,” a Valley High School Health teacher with 10 years of teaching experience, shared that feeling of “seasonal burnout” with Sue, and also spoke to teacher burnout overall:

I would say probably every teacher, you know, probably experiences some degree of burnout from time to time. You know, sometimes, those feelings of burnout can be fleeting. You know, it could be circumstances, the time of year could dictate burnout. It could be if you have a particularly stressful course load. Sometimes if you have classes that are particularly challenging, it can create a sense of burnout for the teacher. I would call this transient burnout where the feelings of burnout are kind of come and go. I would distinguish that from long-term burnout which would be I’m tired of teaching. Long-term burnout would be you can’t wait till you retire. The passion is gone from teaching. The pleasure that you get from interacting with students perhaps is no longer there. You’re just biding your time until you retire or find another job.
A lack of autonomy and empowerment causes stress among teachers at Valley High School. Twenty-three percent (18/78) of Valley High School teachers felt the lack of autonomy they possessed in their daily job functions created stress for them, along with feelings of emotional pain. The lack of autonomy, in relation to this study and teacher burnout, included firsthand descriptions from Valley High School teachers that include the following individual statements. Sue: “not being able to make my own choices and decisions,” George: “not having any power to do what I want,” Cathy: “feeling like I have no say as a non-tenured teacher.” The factor associated with a lack of autonomy for Valley High School teachers leads to the phenomenon known as burnout; it is causality: teachers feel a lack of empowerment, resulting in stress.

Valley High School Physical Education teacher Mack shared his thoughts on the level of autonomy he experienced as a teacher and how autonomy can motivate teachers:

I feel like that’s the one good thing about PE, most administrators don’t come from a PE background, so I think just from the sense that you’re teaching PE, that it’s like kind of an abstract thing for most people. I feel like we do have a lot of autonomy. I think that the one good thing that has always been consistent here is we’ve got to say what we want to do and what our program is going to look like. But as far as autonomy, yeah, I’ve never had an issue with that. And it’s one of the best things about my job, to be honest with you, it makes me happy and motivates me. I don’t have to worry about a boss looking over my shoulder or somebody second guessing everything I do. It’s one of the things I enjoy the most about teaching, to be honest with you.

George believes teacher autonomy is based on subject matter and standardized testing. George believes teachers who teach non-tested subjects get more autonomy over those who teach core academic (tested) subjects such as math, science, English, and history. George simply thought administrators really did not care what non-testing subject matter teachers do in their classes. George believes teachers who teach core academic courses
are subject to district and state mandates, program requirements, and administrator suggestions on program improvement, thus limiting their autonomy, creativity, and personal pedagogy practices.

I believe—as a teacher, I believe I have all the autonomy I need, but again, I think a lot of that is also based on the fact that health and Health Tech are not on the state tests. I know in other departments if you were an English teacher or a math teacher or science teacher, that is—that would be significantly different. But from a health standpoint, I have a lot of autonomy because we're not tested. If somehow I affected the API, that would, that would be radically different, I'm sure.

Cathy, a second year Science teacher, felt great frustration in her second year as a teacher. Cathy stated she was negatively impacted by the limited decision making with which she was empowered. Cathy stated she had little and limited autonomy in the areas of curriculum development, instructional design, and lesson delivery.

We use common lesson designs that were created by teachers a long time ago, same old stuff from a long time ago, I would like to use my own lessons and teach using what I feel would be a good fit for my kids, but I know I have to stick to what the department wants to do. I get frustrated, but I also know that I will be tenured next year and I will start to do my own thing.

**Formal evaluations are a cause of stress for teachers at Valley High School.**

Formal evaluations are yearly judgments placed on teachers that are reflective of their professional duties. Under the California Department of Education policy, most districts follow the Commission on Teacher Credentialing guidelines on formal evaluations: non-tenured teachers are evaluated two times a year for two years and earn permanent (tenure) status on their first day of their third year of teaching. Tenured teachers are formally evaluated on a bi-annual cycle. Formal evaluations do serve as an official judgment on a teacher’s job duties, teaching abilities, and overall status as a professional teacher. For non-tenured teachers, formal evaluations determine permanent status and career outlook,
thus the increased sentiment of stress during the evaluation cycle. Cathy, the second-year science teacher at Valley High School, shared her deep anxiety when it came to formal evaluations:

Yes, formal evaluations do stress me out. These evaluations determine my tenure, plus you have like two or three different vice principals who come watch you teach, it makes me nervous, I cannot wait until I get my tenure, it will help me relax a little.

Twenty-seven percent (21/78) of teachers felt formal evaluations were a cause of stress and emotional anxiety; of these 27%, over 80% were first- or second-year (non-tenured) teachers whose tenure depended on the formal evaluation process, thus the cause for great emotional distress. “Nick,” a math teacher with over 15 years of teaching experience, found frustration and stress in formal evaluations, as well as his teaching job in general, to the point of deeply contemplating a career change:

I’ve had on my evaluations things I’m not proud of and I pride myself on not taking them personally. I take the suggestions and requirements that my supervisors lay down as professional advice. So I make sure I follow that advice and I probably focus much too much on one or two things that are required and if and when the administrator has many different requirements, then for me it’s difficult. I did have an administrator who suggested take on one focus area this year, maybe one or two this year and one or two the next year. With different aspects of my teaching this particular administrator wanted me to improve, one at a time, two at a time – bite sized for me. Not all administrators are like that. Some will want you to focus on a wide variety of things, and maybe rightfully so, but for me it’s challenging to have to address too many different aspects of teaching at one time. Probably there is a lot I need to improve on, but it’s not good to handle more than a couple at a time.

Sue also found frustration in the formal evaluation process and how administrators fail to solicit mutual communication and understanding from teachers during the formal evaluation process:

I teach at a kind of rough high school and the kids require a certain level of discipline and openness and fairness. They require a lot. So I had an administrator
who had never taught in an environment like mine, never taught at a high school, who came in and never taught history at a high school and they had taught elementary school. They came in and told me I was doing everything wrong. I had 13 pages of bad evaluation. Never in my life, anywhere, have I seen anything like that. And I was told to do some elementary things that wouldn’t work with my population. I know my population. That person made my life miserable for two years, it was miserable. I ended up going to the hospital one day. My blood pressure was 200 over 180 something. They put in the bed and said, “You cannot move until this comes down.” I was a wreck. She (the vice principal) left thank God and I got somebody who I don’t know if he was real good, but he left me alone. He thought I handled kids well and he could see that I was teaching. He didn’t bother me. I mean, there’s been coaches (VP’s) who make me crazy because they’ve never taught the population of kids I teach and you don’t know them and you haven’t understood them and then you come in and try tell me how to do it, I just want to shoot you because I think you’re stupid. You’re not real and I’ve lived through that. And when they leave to get another job, I relax.

Sue added that evaluations are pointless unless administrators and school site principals actually “do something” with the information collected from walk-throughs and evaluations:

They come in, watch me teach, and then tell me I cannot teach with some generic form that means nothing to anyone. Well, if that is the case, then show me how to teach, teach me how to teach, you guys are the big shots that make all the money, teach us how to teach our kids, show us how it works, you guys are the instructional leaders and coaches, coach us.

**Negative student behavior causes stress for teachers at Valley High School.**

Student discipline is a stress factor for teachers at Valley High School; 39% of Valley High School teachers experience stress attributed to negative student discipline issues in the classroom. The cause and effect relationship with student behavior and teacher stress is based on two key classroom interactions: student-teacher interactions and student-student interactions. Negative student-teacher interactions are based on power struggles that take in place when defiant students fail to follow class guidelines. Student-student interactions involve one or more student(s) who are off-task and disengaged, frequently
resulting in increased distractions for other students, thus resulting in a group
disruption, leading to a whole-class disruption and ultimately requiring the teacher to
redirect the entire classroom full of 35 to 40 students. This redirection of student
(negative behavior) is time consuming and results in lost valuable instructional time. The
loss of instructional time resulting from negative behavior leads to students missing key
instruction provided by their teacher and adds a level of frustration for teachers. The
results of this cause and effect relationship are highlighted by stressful firsthand accounts
from teachers at Valley High School. Sue, a 25-year teaching veteran, has had students
she would describe as “good” and others she would describe as “horrible.” Sue provides
rich, deep, candid firsthand accounts on how student behavior and discipline issues can
cause teachers great emotional, mental, and physical stress to the point that showing up to
work is a difficult challenge:

Bad students make me feel like crap. My seventh period class is prime example. I
can have a good day up until seventh period. Not only is my seventh period is full
students on IEP’s, but I have a lot of behavior issues in there. It just makes me
furious if kids cuss me out, they disrespect me. I send them up to the office and
then they come back in the next day or two and act like nothing happened.
Student behavior (negative behavior) can wear you out and make you not want to
come to school, especially if you know you got to see the same kid who keeps
doing the same bad crap every day. You watch other kids in your class who just
want to learn and they sit patiently and quietly while these bad-ass little kids just
dominate, take up time, pull the teacher out of a good comfort zone so that the
teacher can’t even relate to the good kids that are in there trying. That just wears
you out, make you just want to go home. You got to eat snacks and watch TV to
unwind, that’s not healthy for people.

Classroom observations were conducted and field notes were collected to add a
level of depth to how student-to-student distractions negatively impact the entire class of
students and pull the teacher away from presenting valuable instruction. Observation
notes revealed that, on average, five class interruptions took place in every 50 minute
A lot of my classes are lower end achieving students. I came to Valley High School, and I had a lot more frequent students who lacked a lot of basic skills, (lacked) proper classroom behavior or expected behavior. A lot more disrespect, challenging my own policies, classroom policies, classroom rules, probably on an hourly basis. Quite frequently this made me exhausted after most periods and doubly so by the end of the day and by the end of the week. Having to answer and deal with challenges on a continuous basis from students seems to have a (negative) physical and emotional affect on me, daily, hourly and year by year.

As a non-tenured teacher with little experience in a highly urbanized and economically disadvantaged school, Cathy used what she called “real down to earth talk” to combat negative student behavior:

Just talk to the kids as if they are a real person, yes sometimes it can be scary, but if I don’t get a handle on it as soon as it happens, I will lose control of my class. If you lose control and kids behave badly, you will go crazy; having bad kids is so stressful.

**Current workloads cause Valley High School teachers tremendous stress.**

Full-time teachers at Valley High School, under the teacher’s contract of Elk Grove Unified School District, have a workload of one Full-Time Equivalent (1.0 FTE). At Valley High School 1.0 FTE translates to teaching five classes, 55 minutes long in length, with a 55-minute preparation period, and a 60-minute duty-free lunch period. The first class starts at 8:00 am and the day ends at 3:00 pm, resulting in a 420-minute work day (seven hours). Of the 420 minutes, 275 minutes are dedicated to instructional time (five
classes), 55 minutes is dedicated to a preparation, 60 minutes are dedicated to a period lunch, and 30 minutes are dedicated to student passing periods (walking from class to class: five minutes each passing period).

The causality relationship between current workloads for Valley High School teachers and stress is based on the fact that there is a finite amount of time that can be utilized during the day to provide students with a quality education. Regardless of student subject mastery (or student underperformance), that finite amount of time cannot be altered nor can it be made up; these frustrations (of time) along with increased demands on teachers result in frustrations manifested through mental, emotional, and physical stress. Fifty-five percent of teachers at Valley High School experience stress due to their workload, resulting in symptoms associated with burnout: mental exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, and physical aches and pains. Cathy was very animated when expressing her concerns about her workload, “As a new teacher, I can barely keep my head above water; I am leaning new thing on a daily basis, dealing with my students, and trying hard to impress the department chair and principal, this work is hard.”

George felt workload demands are increasing on a yearly basis as furloughs and pay cuts continue to demoralize teachers:

We are being asked to do so much more, more adjunct, more paper work, more classes, increased class-size, all this while they are cutting our pay, they want too much from us, it’s just too much. They increase teacher workloads and accountability, but yet they do not provide us with any support or any structure, they say here, go do this and go do that.

Sue expressed concerns that mirror those made by George:

I think, excuse my language, but fake-ass professional learning (meetings) is a waste of time. If you are going to teach me something to use in my classroom be brief about it and don’t drill me on it. Just give it to me and let me process it. I
can’t waste what little time I have in a worthless meeting, our workloads are increasing year by year, administration gives us more to do, but we still have to teach classes. Administration keeps giving us all this stuff, but they forget we have 30, 35, 40 kids we have to teach every period, it is just too much work.

The principal at Valley High School is seen as a source of stress for teachers. Survey results revealed that 25% of Valley High School teachers attributed work-related stress to the personal and professional relationship they had with the school site principal. Teacher stress attributed to the working relationship with a school site principal is based on a cause and effect relationship. The less connected the principal is to the teaching staff, the more likely stress will set in. According to interview data results, the main elements that result in stress for teachers in relation to the principal-teacher relationships are micromanagement of daily duties, lack of support with daily duties, and lack of affirmation for teaching duties.

Sue had negative experiences working with different principals in her 25 years of teaching. Sue’s own words and lived experiences shed light on how some principal-teacher relationships can be problematic:

I have worked under administration where it’s so micromanaged and where you just want to scream and there’s no motivation to teach. It’s like I’ve had one administrator tell me, “Well, you know, I’m coming into evaluate you, I expect you to jump through the hoops.” I’m thinking, “What the hell hoops am I supposed to jump through?” What? If you’re in a fearful situation there’s no motivation. You’re just getting through. You’re waiting for the end, that’s all.

Mack understood the conflict that can take place between teachers and principals when there is a lack of structural support on a daily basis:

I think the stress part is, if you feel like you’re being supported, then it’s not stressful. But if you feel like you’re not being supported, then that’s just like one more person that you feel like is on the other side of the fence instead of on your side of the fence, which causes stress. All any of us ask for is support, be honest
to your job and give us a little support. You ask us to do a million things, but you never follow up or ask how things are going, it’s just not right.

George felt his work was rarely validated because of the subject matter he taught (health). George felt because health is not tested on annual state standardized tests, administrators devalue or ignore his work:

I have invited administrators to come into their classroom for specific activities that I am doing, and if an administrator can't make it or does not show-up, sometimes I feel like well, that I am not important to them or the school.

George also felt principals need to deploy and utilize leadership skills rather than use red tape and bureaucratic procedures to solve problems between teachers when they arise:

I believe that instead of hiding behind these bureaucratic procedures to solve problems, you have the teacher sit down with that person and maybe discuss it and maybe come to a common understanding or respect, bringing union people kills morale. I mean I like to have a good working relationship with people on campus and I think sometimes if an administrator can, you know, just use their leadership skills to, you know, facilitate positive interactions and, to clear up misunderstandings, I think that would be better than just hiding behind procedures, policy, and union threats.

External Burnout Factors

A shortage in instructional funding is a cause of stress for teachers at Valley High School. At Valley High School, 60% of teachers account work-related stress due to shortages of instructional materials; without proper materials and funding, teachers feel their work is not exemplary, which results in a sense of decreased accomplishments and stress. Nick stated he used over $1000 of his own money purchasing scientific calculators for students in his higher-level courses:

I spend my own money on the basics, paper, pens, and transparencies. My calculus class does not even have scientific calculators to us. I had to use my own money to by a complete set, over a thousand dollars worth. Why can we keep giving high level administrators pay raises, but not even supply teachers with the basics to support their students.
Mack claimed he has to purchase new basketballs with his own money every year because playing on the blacktop leaves the basketballs dirty and damaged. Adding his personal frustrations with school and student funding:

You and I walk around here all day and see kids throwing free lunch, free breakfast, and free supper. And where does it end up? On the ground, usually. They don’t even care about it. They get bussed in here for free, we spend so much money on them, but yet we have to play outside on the asphalt and I gotta pay for new basketballs and new equipment because they get damaged and dirty. Something is wrong here, and I’m supposed to take a cut in pay because there’s no money. Yeah, okay. [Laughter] Okay.

Cathy expressed her frustration and stress in being forced to use her own finances to purchase lab equipment in hopes of giving students success opportunities:

I had to buy lab equipment using my own money. I was sad to find out that the previous teachers who worked here never did labs because there was no funding to support it. The only way to make science fun is with labs, if I want kids to learn, I have to buy lab equipment using my own money.

**Budget cuts and lay-off notices create great stress for Valley High School teachers.** Ninety percent of teachers at Valley High School stated budget cuts and pink-slip lay-off notices were a source of great emotional and mental stress. Of the 78 teachers at Valley High School, 12 were given pink-slip lay-off notices during the 2011-2012 school year. These teacher cuts not only cause emotional stress to those receiving the lay-off notices, but also to fellow teachers, administrators, and colleagues.

According to primary documents (EGUSD, 2012a), EGUSD experienced budget cuts totaling in excess of $100 million from the time period of 2010 to 2012. These cuts are attributed to federal, state, and local hardships and tax perplexities, and have taken a profound and negative toll on teachers, students, and parents. During that time period, over 1,000 teachers received pink-slip lay-off notices, along with cuts to student services,
bus transportation, library funding, classified staff funding, certificated staff funding, athletics, and general maintenance and operations funding. For the 2012-2013 school year, the EGUSD conducts business operating a budget in excess of $486.4 million, with an estimated $65 million surplus after a complete expenditure approximation estimate.

Mack expressed his sentiments and frustrations with the lack of financial support for teachers, increased budget cuts, and wasted spending:

That’s been the most demoralizing thing that I’ve seen in my 20 years, the lip service of, oh we value teachers, and, oh, we value this and we value that and as soon as the money gets tight or as soon as the money goes away, it’s, you know, “You guys are lucky to have a job.” All of a sudden the tune changes, you know. It’s like 20 years ago this was the best district in the area, pays a little more, and you really have to have your stuff together to get a job in this district.” Fast forward 20 years to, “Hey, you’re lucky you’ve got a job.” Yeah. I think it sends a message that they don’t value the people and don’t care about what you do. I mean, that’s pretty straightforward as far as I’m concerned. You know, when you’ve got a $65 million budget surplus and you’re asking me to pay for my health care, it doesn’t take a genius to figure out, what are you going to do when you don’t have a $65 million surplus? How much of the health care am I going to be paying then? So, over the last two years all the talk was about test scores and student achievement, but then to just like that we are the only district in the area to drop nine days off the school year just like that because of money, while the board members are getting raises and the superintendent’s getting raises. That says all you need to know.

I mean, I say I think that the last two years of these budget cuts, the district has, specifically the superintendent and definitely the board, has sent a message to teachers that, “You’re lucky you have a job, and that’s the way you should go about it.” So when I think about doing something extra, I think, “What would the district do? Would they go out of their way to help me out? Probably not.” You know, we had a leap year February, and then we didn’t get paid on the 28th like we normally do. They paid us on the 29th. So that’s the way I look at it. It’s like, “Okay, at every turn you’re going to do what’s right for you. So guess what I’m going to do at every turn? I’m going to do what’s right for me. That’s the message you’ve sent.” And that’s the way I feel about the whole budget thing. It’s like, so we’re going to take it right out of the classroom. You and I walk around here all day and see kids throwing free lunch, free breakfast, and free supper. And where does it end up? On the ground, usually. They don’t even care about it. They get bussed in here for free. But I’m supposed to take a cut in pay because there’s no money. Yeah, okay. [Laughter] Okay.
George also viewed budget-cut lay-offs as a serious blow to morale and motivation:

Last year, I got a pink slip, which really sucked. My morale was low; I was wounded after that because a lot of my job requires long-term planning. I mean right now, we're planning Health TECH stuff three, four, five years in the future. We're trying to get a clinic on campus. I'm already in the process of planning next year's health fair. I'm planning next year's CASH presentations, and when I got that pink slip, my life was kind of in limbo. I mean I didn't want to spend significant time on my weekends and on holidays planning for something I may not be around to implement in the future. I know that probably holds true with other teachers. I mean I'm always creating new curriculum. I'm creating curricula now that's going to be implemented next year and I know with these budget cuts, if you're a teacher, and you get pink slipped, that kind of puts everything in limbo. It's like, you know, I don't know if I should be working on this. I need to be applying for jobs or I need to be polishing up my resume. So from that standpoint, that can zap morale.

**Standardized testing is a cause of stress among teachers at Valley High School**

**School.** Of the 78 teachers who teach at Valley High School, 49 teachers teach in a “tested subject,” math, science, history, and English language arts. Over 60% of these teachers attributed work-related stress to standardized testing. The causality between student standardized testing and teacher stress can only be fully understood by understanding how standardized testing works. In the state of California, under the Federal Education Reform of No Child Left Behind, standardized tests are called California Standardized Tests or CSTs. Yearly tests are given in the subjects of math, science, history, and English language arts. The yearly tests are measured, and schools and school districts are given progress reports and grades that determine their funding and autonomy. If a school is failing, it results in a decrease of federal funds and the school goes into program improvement. Program improvement involves cutbacks in funding, teacher staff, administrative staff, increased federal and state evaluations, loop holes, job performance obstacles, and program cuts (Rueter, 2005). Under program
improvement, the federal government empowers state agencies to overrule local school boards, superintendents, and controls what happens at school sites and districts.

Sue shared her personal experience and firsthand accounts related to the negative impacts that arrive with standardized testing:

When we first started CST (standardized testing), I thought it was a joke, I hated it. What if a kid had a bad day, or was feeling sick, or just did not focus, the kid scores bad and I get blamed for it, what a joke.

Cathy expressed her concerns with CST testing and how she felt testing can hinder her tenure status:

I know that CST testing is important to some administrators. My worry is that what if my kids did not score well from last year and the principal wants to judge me on testing scores and not hire me back? I have no real control of what is tested or how kids perform. I can teach to the test, but kids will not really learn anything. The most frustrating thing is that testing takes place during the school year, while kids are still learning what will be tested. There is no logic, why test kids in early spring while teachers are still covering material, there is no time and we have to rush just to get enough material in before testing.

Nick expressed his sentiments on CST testing and the impact it has on his students and him:

I have expectations in my mind on what I think my students should do based on standards. For instance, as I progress through the lesson, I see my students too frequently don’t have the standards down, the basics, too often they haven’t met prerequisite standards. I constantly have to make a decision as to whether I should be focusing on the material that the students are presently taking which I know they are required to fulfill to keep pace for when testing arrives or slow down and review things over and over, taking up time. I realize it’s impossible to do the current work without having some of the basic skills. I’m constantly trying to decide, well I know what I’m required to teach for testing, but I also realize I should be teaching to the current level of the students. Perhaps the most interesting phenomenon discovered in this study (in relation to the cause and effect of CSTs on teacher stress levels) is that both testing and non-testing teachers feel the negative impact of CSTs. Mack maintained that standardized testing led
to inequities among teachers. Mack teaches physical education, a non-tested area.

Mack stated that physical education teachers are “treated like second-rate teachers by administrators” because physical education teachers do not have to prepare students for standardized tests, which results in increased class sizes for physical education teachers in an effort to lower class sizes for testing classes such as English, math, science, and history. Mack expressed great frustration in this dilemma and claimed his subject matter and professional credential deserves just as much respect as other subjects. The frustrations Mack faces made him feel like his job was not validated or valued:

It makes me feel like a babysitter. It makes me feel like what we do in our PE class isn’t as valued as what’s happening on a test. Our class numbers have gone way up because, you know, we have some kids who take two math classes or two English classes or whatever it is to support them to do better on the CSTs. Class sizes stayed down in the core classes that are being tested. Well, guess what happens to the subjects like PE and the other subjects? Classes sizes go way up, too many kids, it’s not right. You know, I’ve got 53 kids in my first period class. That’s a direct result of our schedule being adjusted around those testing classes. We have kids in two math classes and two English classes. So if you’ve got a teacher that’s teaching the same 15 kids third period and the same 15 kids fourth period, well, guess where that FTE goes? Yeah, I mean, the kid’s got to go somewhere, they go down to PE, and that’s why we have 45, 50, 55 kids in each class. So with the CST testing, what it’s really done for non-CST subjects is it’s moved them down the ladder, and we’ve become warehousing, basically, there is no district cap on PE classes. How many skill-developing things am I supposed to get in with 53 kids in a 50-minute class period? I mean, so that tells you the message is being sent from above that, “Hey, we don’t really care about what you’re doing as long as they’re not hurting each other.

As a health teacher, George felt as if there is little school-wide emphasis on his subject matter because there is no standardized test that counts toward school scores:

I think as a teacher in a non-tested area, I believe that really, my work is not as valued as a teacher that's in a tested area. We place a lot of emphasis on our core subject areas on campus, English, social studies, math and, and, and so on because they're tested. From a non-tested standpoint, I believe that the administrators really don't value the types of skill-building and the type of learning that happens in our classrooms because it doesn't move API at all or help with scores according
to them. You know, our students have learned a lot of valuable skill, but the skills they obtain are not valued by the district or administrators because they're not tested.

**Results and Interpretations**

This current research reveals that Valley High School teachers are suffering from (teacher) burnout; this is accurate and apparent by the analysis of the raw data collected and the revealed findings. The elements causing teacher burnout are broad, but one fact is certain, teacher burnout is indeed a cause-effect established phenomenon based on the theory of causality. Teacher burnout does not just happen as an independent component that takes over a teacher’s will to teach. Instead, teacher burnout is part of a growing social construct created over long periods of time and is the result of prolonged stressors that are, unfortunately, part of a cycle that grows larger and larger as teachers are engulfed and consumed by the moving pieces feeding the cycle. These moving pieces, as described in the findings of this study, are internal and external elements.

The theory of causality in relation to teacher burnout was manifested in this study and is validated by several research studies. McCormick and Kerry (2011) conducted a study focused on teachers’ attributions for stress and their relationships and found that student misbehavior does lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decrease in personal accomplishment, thus authenticating and supporting the theory of causality as the grounds for the construction of teacher burnout. Teacher burnout is based on a cause and effect relationship between the teacher and multiple moving parts (stressors). These moving parts start to put exhaustion upon a teacher, resulting in more stressors (or moving pieces) infiltrating the mental focus, emotional stability, and physical wellbeing with teacher burnout as the definitive result.
Nine important variables that greatly impact teacher motivation and stress altitude among teachers at Valley High School were examined in this mixed-methods study; all nine variables are based on the concept of causality. The nine variables, independent or united, cause great stress in teachers and highlight the idea of the snowball effect that eventually results in burnout. The nine variables are teacher burnout (itself as a variable), teacher autonomy, formal evaluations, student behavior/class management, teacher workloads, principal-teacher relationships, school funding, budget cuts/economic hardship, and standardized testing.

Numerous preceding studies and literature that have demonstrating the relationship between teacher stress and the above mentioned variables (stressors) validated the results of this study at Valley High School. Studies such as those conducted by Eggers (2011), Farber (2010), and Fisher (2011) have all uncovered the realities of stress in the teaching profession. The purpose or rationale of linking this study conducted at Valley High School with other studies in the academic field was to add a level of depth and validation to not only outside studies, but to the study that took place at Valley High School. The most effective approach in convening the results and interpretations of this study is to filter each variable (findings data) through three key steps: what are the forces at play, how does it affect teachers, and how can those forces be stopped. The forces at play refer to what the study at Valley High School revealed about a given variable (or cause) of teacher burnout. The affect aspect is aimed at how the variable(s) impacts the teachers at Valley High School, how it results in stress that leads to burnout. Most importantly, this section also discusses how these variables can be eliminated or reduced in order to provide Valley High School teachers with a remedy.
**Teacher burnout.** The first and foremost discussion that must take place is a discussion surrounding teacher burnout itself. It was discovered during this research process that teachers at Valley High School are suffering from teacher burnout while expectations, demands, and requirements build up. As a result, teachers at Valley High School are being forced to ingest a steady stream of stressors that, overtime, build up to the point that emotional exhaustion, as part of the continuum of burnout, sets in, thus resulting in a chain reaction that will leave a teacher emotionally, mentally, and physically crippled. What was concluded from this study is that teacher burnout is part of a growing social construct mainly based on human interactions that consist of, for the most part, the above listed variables. The above listed variables are part of the cycle resulting in the snowball effect that leaves teachers as victims of teacher burnout. The subsequent goal of deconstructing the remaining variables is to describe implications that will support the development of practices aimed at breaking the cycle that has consumed many teachers at Valley High School.

**Teacher autonomy.** Literature reviewed was consistent with the results and implications this study revealed in addressing the issues surrounding increased stress levels with the lack of teacher autonomy. Pearson and Moomaw (2006) stated, “That empowering teachers is an appropriate starting point for education experts to solve current school problems” (p. 44). The forces at play in terms of autonomy are forces strictly revolving around the idea that some subject matter courses are more important and more valuable to students than other courses, and some teachers are more valued for teaching the “more valuable” courses. Such a force causes a snowball effect that leads to some teachers being more empowered over other teachers. This inequality of teacher
empowerment and autonomy is a clear variable that leaves teachers feeling stressed, thus invitng the continuum of teacher burnout to set in. The forces at play in this study are clear, the less autonomy a teacher has, the more he or she will feel stressed and exhausted, consequently resulting in student failure. The more autonomy a teacher has, the more satisfied he or she will be with his or her teaching career, thus resulting in student success (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006).

The most effective manner in which school site administrators can help teachers feel empowered and break the cycle of stress is through “professional learning communities,” or PLCs (DuFour, 2006). To fully support teachers and provide them autonomy, principals and school leaders must establish “teacher leaders” on campus and within departments. This practice is not only rich in the literature reviewed but is also a heavily discussed idea evident within this study. Valley High School teachers are willing to be and in need of being empowered and given trust to make key choices within the school structure. Allowing for the dispersion of decision making results in shared ownership, a sentiment of belonging, and a feeling of empowerment, all resulting in increased levels of motivation for teachers. DuFour (2006) wrote that collaboration, shared decision making, and a student-focused success mindset results in success for teachers and students. Valley High School, either through teacher initiative, or administrative leadership, must design or implement PLCs to the point that fidelity is met at every level of the school’s organizational structure and so every staff member and faculty member is empowered to be part of the decision-making process.

Formal evaluations. The forces at play causing teachers great anxiety and stress in relation to formal evaluations are that, according to this study, teachers at Valley High
School find little to no value in the evaluation process. Formal evaluations at Valley High School are part of a process based on going through the motions and checking off the list to meet deadlines and mandates. There are little to no meaningful outcomes associated with formal evaluations for tenured teachers. Teachers feel stressed and somewhat annoyed with the evaluation process for several reasons. It is nearly impossible to remove a tenured teacher from a teaching position based on perforce (formal) evaluations in the state of California (CDE, n.d.). According to this study, oftentimes administrators have no established connection or meaningful relationship to the teachers they evaluate. What was revealed during the research process at Valley High School was that teachers who are going to be evaluated want ongoing, valued relationships with those who conduct the evaluation, often absent according to this study. The non-tenured teachers who took part of this study stated that formal evaluations stress them out because they understand these formal evaluations can be used as a tool to not reelect teachers and remove them from the site. Non-tenured teachers in this study also stated that formal evaluations are part of the process that leads to tenure and that once tenure is gained, they will feel more comfortable with the idea of “doing things my way,” as one non-tenured teacher stated.

DiPaola and Hoy (2008) wrote that the formal evaluation process should be an opportunity to provide cognitive coaching and mentorship between administrators and teachers, that coaching, support, and growth are the aim of any truly effective evaluation process. Platt (2008) suggested the focus on teacher learning, professional development, and true cognitive coaching should be the center of attention of the evaluation process,
not red tape and liability check-off lists that often consume public education teacher evaluations.

As a viable solution, Valley High School would greatly benefit from an observation structure based on peer-to-peer observations followed by coaching opportunities and professional learning opportunities that meet defined and observed weak areas. The professional learning that results from these suggested peer-to-peer coaching opportunities can lead to increased mastery for formal evaluations, greater teacher development, and an increase in student achievement.

**Negative student behavior.** Teachers at Valley High School viewed the variable of negative student behavior as a major force in play causing emotional stress as part of the continuum of burnout. The variable of negative student behavior, according to this study, is the most influential element that will cause teachers to quickly move along the continuum of teacher burnout development. Negative student behavior can occur between two or more students, or between student(s) and teacher. This study revealed that the daily classroom interactions teachers have with students is the largest factor that can either provide teachers validation and motivation for their profession, or complete abhorrence and indolent feeling for their profession.

The results and implications in relation to the variable of negative student behavior are consistent with the literature on teacher burnout. Boyle, Borg, Falzon, and Baglioni (1995) conducted a comprehensive study that included over 700 teachers with the focus of the study based on the results of negative relationships occurring in the classroom. Boyle et al. (1995) found that interpersonal relationships between teachers and students are paramount to creating a successful environment for the collective school
community, as well as individuals. Boyle et al. (1995) also added that teachers who are positively connected to other students, students, and staff experience greater enjoyment in their jobs. The approach to break the cycle of negative student behavior in the classroom is based on improving student structure in lesson design and support for individual needs that include social development, academic success, and emotional support (Burnside, 2012).

Teachers at Valley High School would greatly benefit from professional learning focused on Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS). PBIS professional development is aimed at providing teachers with focused best practices and lessons based on a tier system for academic and behavior interventions; the three tiers are structured as follows: Tier 1: primary preventions, which includes behavior and academic goals for the entire school. Tier 2: secondary prevention is structured for specialized student populations. Tier 3: tertiary prevention is structured for high-risk student populations that generally consist of a very small population (Bradshaw, Pas, Goldweber, Rosenberg, & Leaf, 2012). Using PBIS would not only help Valley High School teachers build positive relationships with their students, but it would also positively impact student academic achievement.

**Teacher workloads.** Teacher workloads are indeed a factor associated with the development of stress in teachers. The causality relationship between current workloads for teachers at Valley High School and stress is based on the teaching profession itself; the daily duties, daily routines, professional demands, regulations, policies, student behavior, and the overall comprehensive pressures that come with being an educator. Teachers at Valley High School simply feel they are doing too much with too little and
not enough time; as a result, teachers are falling victim to the cycle resulting in emotional stress. The increasing number of demands or duties placed on teacher’s results in a failure to focus on limited demands or duties that can be completed to success. The implications associated with workloads is that administrators established policies and mandates are asking teachers to be “a jack of all trades, master of none,” a concept that teachers at Valley High School find very frustrating.

Stress-causing forces associated with teacher workloads are all dependent on how the school is organized and what systems are in place. Organizational structures and systems are elements a school site principal or school leadership team can profoundly and directly impact, either for good or bad. Pink (2009) suggested motivation can flourish under structures and systems designed, implemented, and evaluated as part of supporting teachers and their motivation levels. These structures and systems are used to provide each teacher with specific duties, expectations, structure, and timelines. It is important to see this study revealed that Valley High School teachers feel effective organizational structures do indeed support the development and sentiment of teamwork, passion, stability, support, and effectiveness, all characteristic of an effective and healthy school (Levi, 2011).

**Principal-teacher relationships.** Teachers at Valley High School perceive principal-provided support and interpersonal relationships as strong forces with regard to stress and the development of teacher burnout. The forces at play are based on the support the principal does or does not provide, as well as the personal and professional relationships in place or not. The implications here are paramount and are revealed in this study. Implications suggest that teachers who feel a strong bond with the principal
are generally much more motivated about their daily duties knowing the principal will support their individual needs. Teachers simply want to be liked and supported by the principal, a concept based on social construction that also serves as the base for the phenomenon known as teacher burnout.

Finnigan (2012) suggested the most effective method for providing teachers the support needed is to have systems in place, provide structure, and rely on personal and professional relationships based on trust, values, morals, and mutual validation, affirmation, and respect. Valley High School would greatly benefit from the establishment and implementation of teacher and staff initiated Valley Viking Values (Vikings being the mascot) that help promote the mission and vision of the school, two key concepts that serve as the baseline for positive working relationships (Stemler & Bebell, 2012).

**School funding shortage/budget cuts.** School funding and budget cuts (economic hardships) have been combined due to the similarities the two topics share in the implications revealed in this study. The forces at play when it comes to funding and budget cuts are that Valley High School teachers feel they are, as mentioned above, being asked to do so much more, with much fewer resources. Teachers are frustrated with increasing cuts to educational programs and staffing. As a result, teachers are feeling less and less valued. The implications are that if teachers are getting paid less and are provided with less, they do not expect the same results when fully funded programs and projects were being applied. Teachers at Valley High School stated the implications of budget cuts are serious enough to cause great strife and panic. The implications are that teachers are not able to properly educate students due to shortage of materials, resulting
in declining tests scores and student achievement. An additional implication of
budget cuts is that teachers are losing jobs due to pink-slip lay-off notices; younger
teachers are victims of seniority-based lay-offs.

The solution to budget cuts is a policy-based solution, one requiring states and
local governing bodies to design, implement, and monitor effective school reform.
Policymakers and governing bodies who seek tangible and accurate success in creating
school reform policy must employ and seek the advice and guidance of professional
educators. Educators who encompass a vast variety of experiences, knowledge, and
values will shape true reform ideas, those like that of Ravitch (2010) who stated that
policymakers and governing bodies need to focus on more of the values of culture,
history, ethnicity, and community when designing effecting school reform. School
reform aimed at developing the whole child (mentally, emotionally, physically,
psychologically, and socially) while being mindful that students’ minds are not empty
corrals, but rather richly filled banks with a plethora of valuable life experiences,
knowledge, and understanding of how their world works (Freire, 1968).

**Standardized testing.** Standardized testing is a frustrating force with which
teachers at Valley High School struggle. Standardized testing is the result of failed
school reform attempts created with influence from corporations, interest groups,
legislative bodies, and political agendas. Oftentimes, these legislative bodies are unaware
of the negative consequences standardized testing has on schools and students. The
frustrations Valley High School teachers express in relation to standardized testing is a
shared expression among many in academia, which often results in the implication that
teachers will only teach to the test, proving little to no individual attention to student is
needed beyond test preparation. Standardized testing does not only impact students, but also leaves teachers feeling unmotivated for two main reasons: teachers will simply “drill and test” their students and teachers who are in non-tested areas are seen as second-class teachers employed only to provide, as one teacher stated, a place to babysit students.

Perhaps the most recognizable opponent of standardized testing is Diane Ravitch, former US Assistant Secretary of Education. Ravitch (2010) shared the same sentiments as Valley High School teachers; educators understand there are too many uncontrollable and unseen factors that can result in poor performance by students on standardized tests. Politicians should not control how students are tested or what content students are tested on (Strauss, 2010). Effective educational reform policies must include researched-based theories and practices that support student achievement, teacher achievement, and overall school achievement. A paramount step in creating effective, long-lasting, positive educational reform is understanding that teachers desire and seek support because the more support structures that are in place as a result of reform, the more successful students will be (Dworkin, 2001). Some important and critical elements reformers must keep in mind when creating reform is that diversity, ethnicity, and culture do matter; honoring the humanity of children, families, and history is valued among stakeholders (Nieto, 2007). In addition to valuing culture and history, effective school reformers and change agents must understand communities, value traditions, and design and support coherent curricula (Ravitch, 2010).
Summary

Chapter 4 undeniably and with great certainty, serves as the most important and complex segment of this research study that took place at Valley High School. Chapter 4 provided Valley High School teachers a voice with which to express their concerns, and provided the investigator the opportunity to connect teacher concerns with research-based solutions. This mixed-methods study on teacher burnout used raw survey, interview, and observation data to capitulate meaningful findings that spoke to the phenomenon known as teacher burnout. The findings and pertinent information in this chapter were developed through triangulation, synthesis, and analysis on data, and suggestive solutions to the problem were identified. Teacher burnout develops through internal and external factors, and both include a plethora of elements shaped from the theory causality. Teacher burnout is socially constructed; it happens as part of the human element within the teaching profession. Human interaction, professional demands, administrative pressures, district regulations, political red tape, and personal dilemmas are reasons why teachers develop teacher burnout. The same reasons teacher burnout develops are the same tools that can be employed to provide curative and preventative support. If teacher burnout is caused by negative human interaction and flawed policy, then positive human interactions and effective policy can be a cure. The prevention and cure of teacher burnout is paramount to teacher health and student success. One way teachers can ensure student achievement and a positive school-wide culture is to support each other and maintain support networks, those based on the human element of positive interactions, support, and collective guidance (Nieto, 2007; Quinn, 2003).
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The study sought to investigate and discover the causes of teacher burnout within the teaching staff at Valley High School. The continuing emotional and mental stress teachers face in their teaching duties, workloads, interpersonal relationships, and failed political reforms, cause burnout in the teachers. Teacher burnout is not only negatively impacting student learning but is also causing great emotional, mental, psychological, and physical harm to the well-being of teachers.

Valley High School teachers were asked to open up, dig deep, and express their personal stories with raw emotion and genuine sentiments on the frustrations and stressors they faced on a daily basis as educators. The research revealed how teachers at Valley High School viewed the construct of teacher burnout, how they personally described burnout, and how burnout developed and manifested within them. Most importantly, Valley High School teachers suggested how teacher burnout can be cured or prevented, shedding light on viable solutions. This study was designed, executed, and analyzed with the objective to provide teachers with meaningful support structures based around effective organizational structures, personal support, professional support, mentorship, and a deep understanding of how to navigate complex and uncontrollable external factors.

Teachers who lack the empowerment and autonomy they desire fail to find sustained passion within their job duties, find no satisfaction in working with students, and are absent to the sentiments of success, drive, and enthusiasm. Non-tenured teachers
face a bureaucratic evaluation structure that provides them with little or no true opportunities to receive coaching, mentoring, and professional development opportunities. Instead, these non-tenured teachers are forced to work with the most difficult groups and student populations, often teaching full classes and overcrowded sections of lower achieving students who bring with them a plethora of behavior issues, along with academic deficiencies. Perhaps one of the most frustrating elements for teachers at Valley High School is the increased workload responsibilities; teachers are being asked to take on more duties, while budget cuts dissolve programs and decrease funding, resulting in teacher lay-offs and eliminated enrichment programs.

American politics, local governing bodies, and failed reform have all failed teachers, students, parents, and community members. A Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind, and the Race to the Top have all increased and supported the generic “one-size-fits-all” standardized testing that has failed students repeatedly and increased unrealistic pressure on teachers. Burnout is a consequence of stress that ultimately results in teachers leaving the profession at increased rates and earlier in their careers. Teacher turnover is at an all-time high, causing great damage to the public school system and damage to students’ abilities to learn and develop (Rosales, 2011).

Conclusions

The frustrations Valley High School teachers face on a daily basis are frustrations indicating apparent symptoms of teacher burnout. The research questions for this study were aimed at and focused on the voice and sentiments of the teachers and how they viewed teacher burnout through their personal lenses. Conclusions of this study are based on providing viable, meaningful, and effective answers to each of the study’s three
research questions. The data collected from surveys, interviews, and observations have provided meaningful answers. The research questions and discovered answers for this study follow.

1. **How would teachers at Valley High School describe teacher burnout?**

   Using firsthand accounts, quotes, and survey results, teachers at Valley High School described teacher burnout as the emotional depletion of any desire to teach coupled with mental pressure and stress so great that teaching becomes a struggle as opposed to a delight. Teachers added that burnout is actual physical pain and a loss of physical energy. Teachers at Valley High School also described teacher burnout to be a warning sign that it might be time to retire or move on from the teaching profession.

2. **What would teachers at Valley High School say are the key contributing elements or factors that cause teacher burnout?**

   Through the research process and study, teachers expressed that burnout is attributed to two main factors (patterns), as described in Chapter 4. These factors are internal stressors and external stressors, or burnout factors. Valley High School teachers found both to be equally frustrating, as both have elements that contribute to teacher burnout. The key internal contributing factors causing teacher burnout are a lack of empowerment for teachers (lack of autonomy), formal evaluations linked to work performance judgments, and tenure status also causing teachers stress. Negative student behavior in the classroom was a clear link between teachers and stress. Teachers expressed great concern with negative student behavior issues; this dynamic was not only expressed through surveys and interviews, but was also observed in real time. Valley High School teachers stated that increased workloads, job duty demands, and decreased
funding have been major contributors to stress and burnout. Teachers at Valley High School feel as if they are being asked to do more and take on more duties, while receiving less financial support and program funding; this is attributed to the external burnout factor linked to federal and state budget cuts that result in downsizing, lay-offs, and pink-slips.

3. What suggestions or interventions would teachers at Valley High School provide as a means to prevent or alleviate teacher burnout?

Teachers at Valley High School, through the interview process, expressed their personal suggestions, interventions, and ideas that can prevent or alleviate teacher burnout. The overarching theme emerging from the research is that there is a pressing need for effective support structures. Specifically identified were effective leadership, organized systems, empowerment, autonomy, and the validation of their professionalism. Interventions should add value to the school community as a means of preventing and curing teacher burnout.

Recommendations

Two main themes and nine variables emerged from the findings of this study of teacher burnout at Valley High School. As presented in the Results and Interpretations section of Chapter 4, emergent patterns are listed as follows.

Theme #1. Internal Burnout Factors:

Variables. Teacher Burnout, Teacher Autonomy, Formal Evaluations, Negative Student Behavior, Teacher Workloads, Principal-Teacher Relationships.

Theme #2. External Burnout Factors:

Variables. School Funding, Budget Cuts, Standardized Testing (School Reform).
Grounded in these patterns, the recommendations for action are presented and categorized by theme. To dramatically improve the climate, culture, and teacher motivation levels at Valley High School, stakeholders must fully utilize the following recommendations for sustainable, positive change.

**Address Internal Burnout Factors**

1. Valley High School has an obligation to create teacher-guided systems and structures for peer support and peer mentoring.

2. Valley High School teachers can empower themselves by focusing on collaboration and ownership of school sponsored programs, curriculum, and decision making.

3. Valley High School administrators need to create a transparent and targeted formal evaluation process based on interpersonal relationships (informal and formal), cognitive coaching, peer observations, and frequent classroom visits, all aimed at professional growth opportunities and teacher development.

4. Valley High School teachers need to build stronger relationships with students by using social-affective lessons focusing on student diversity and diversity affirmation.

5. Valley High School administrators and the principal need to build positive relationships with all stakeholders and create informal opportunities to build personal connections.

6. Valley High School teachers need to become more active and voice their opinions to local governing bodies.
7. Valley High School teachers need to meet and exceed all curriculum standards, benchmarks, and focus on building positive relationships with students as the means to prepare students for college and career opportunities.

**Addressing External Burnout Factors**

1. Valley High School stakeholders (teachers, administration, district officials, board members) need to review and adjust demands set upon teachers, calling for a decrease in adjunct duties, master schedule re-arrangement, and class size reductions.

**Further Research**

The research that took place at Valley High School not only can produce rapid and positive changes to the school culture, climate, and motivation levels of teachers but can also serve as a foundation and springboard for further research. To inform resolution of teacher burnout within this local and the larger context of the teaching profession, the following recommendations are made for further research:

1. How leadership roles and leadership demands on administrators affect stress levels: Administrator burnout.

2. How the pressure of Advanced Placement and Honors classes affect students: Student burnout.

3. The justification and outcomes of using Professional Learning Communities.

4. How strategic planning and master plans are designed and implemented for secondary schools.

5. The effects peer mentoring have on secondary school teachers.

6. The utilization of team teaching and the effects on teacher burnout.
7. The utilization of technology in the classroom and the effects on teacher burnout.

8. How cultural, ethnic, and racial similarities influence student-teacher relationships, as well as student achievement levels.

**Summary**

The potential solutions and recommendations in this chapter were discovered through the research process. The data collection tools of surveys, interviews, and observations served as a means to state a problem, design a study, yield meaningful results, and produce concrete solutions to the problem. This study that took place at Valley High School was organic and alive to the teachers of Valley High School; the teachers served as the source for not only the raw data presented but also as the means for curative and preventative action.

Teachers can unite to create support structures and mentor groups aimed at teacher efficacy. Teachers can take a pro-active approach to supporting each other in the daily grind they face. Teachers involved in such a support structure can create a school-wide focus on preventing teacher burnout and creating positive school climate. The best line of defense versus stress or the development of burnout is to have others who face the same conflict be supportive mentors. Teachers understand the needs and struggles of each other’s problems. Ultimately, teachers are prepared to provide their peers with meaningful support. Teachers must work hand-in-hand to implement and develop a comprehensive, multilevel, and cohesive structure in which co-workers and teachers work in a cooperative and collaborative fashion to support each other in efforts to successfully educate students.
School site administrators must also provide a complex level of support, not just in the form of interpersonal relationships, but also in the form of systems and organizational structures that will ensure the best possible resolution of the problems and complex forces teachers face. The Valley High School teachers who participated in this study found value in the survey items, as they spoke to true frustrations of the public education reality in California. Valley High School teachers also showed their passion and raw emotions in the interviews that took place; one thing is certainly clear, Valley High School teachers do care about their students and want to see students succeed.

Valley High School teachers also showed a deep passion for support structures and expressed the need of support structures. The potential solutions that can be implemented will provide Valley High School teachers the support needed to prevent and cure burnout. These curative and preventative solutions can be assistive to teachers in the professional educator’s population beyond this school.

Teacher burnout not only negatively impacts students but also has a long-lasting impact on teachers as well. Teacher burnout can cause irreversible damage to the human psyche, damage to the human body, and destroy professional careers, as well as impair personal accomplishments. Teachers who suffer from burnout are not only failing, but are also failing students. There is no possible way an over-stressed teacher suffering from burnout can properly prepare and present lessons to effectively educate students. Teacher burnout is part of a large problem in education plaguing America’s education system. Young students are failing on a daily basis not because they are not capable of mastery, but because their teachers are not emotionally well, mentally sound, and physically healthy.
Teachers are leaving the profession at continuously increasing rates, at younger ages, and earlier in their careers. Teacher burnout is a serious ailment that must gain the swift attention and serious action of policymakers, local governing bodies, school officials, administrators, and most importantly, teachers. Teachers must be the largest proponent for actionable solutions and demand, unconditionally, that curative and preventative action be taken against the phenomenon known as teacher burnout.
List of References


Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Qualitative Data Collection Tool: Interview on Teacher Burnout

**Time of the interview:**
**Date of the interview:**
**Place of the interview:**

**Interviewer:** Mohammad Warrad

**Interviewee:**

**Position of the interviewee:**

**Project description:** This study will consist of qualitative research methods that will include an interview that will be recorded with filed notes. This interview will then be transcribed and analyzed for themes; these themes will help determine factors that lead to teacher burnout. This interview (themes) will also help edit, refine, and modify the accompanied literature review.

**Questions (semi-structured):**
1. Are you familiar with burnout/teacher burnout?
2. How does your relationship with the principal affect your motivation level?
3. How does a lack of personal autonomy/freedom in the workplace make you feel?
4. Is NCLB/Standard Based Testing a factor to your motivation and how you teach?
5. Does your relationship with your students influence your motivation? How so?

**Topics (informal structure):**
1. Student behavior
2. Teacher autonomy
3. STAR Testing (teaching to the test/lack of academic freedom)
4. Formal evaluations
5. Interpersonal relationships
6. School reform/NCLB
7. Teaching Subject
8. Teaching Salary

*Interview can either stay structured or be informal depending on which direction the interviewee takes it. The interview structure is open to entice important information from the interviewee.

**Notes:**
Appendix B: Observation Protocol

Qualitative Data Collection Tool: Observation Form on Teacher Burnout

**Observer:** Mohammad Warrad

**Person being observed:**

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<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location/ Site:</td>
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<td>Length of observation:</td>
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<tr>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Engaged v.s. Not Engaged</td>
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<td>Time:</td>
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<td>Time:</td>
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<td>Time:</td>
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<th>Observation Environment Sketch:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student incidents (behavior issues):</th>
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<tr>
<th>Questions:</th>
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Appendix C: Survey Protocol

Quantitative Data Collection Tool: Teacher Burnout Survey
Please read each item and circle the option that best applies to you and your teaching job duties

As a teacher at Valley High School, the professional relationship I have with the Principal stresses me out:

1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, my professional relationships with the administration team stress me out:

1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, the shortages of resource materials I receive stress me out:

1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, the level of autonomy and power I have stress me out:

1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, formal observations stress me out:

1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree
As a teacher at Valley High School, California Standardized Testing (CST) stresses me out:
1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, student behavior and discipline issues stress me out:
1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, the lack of academic freedom I have stresses me out:
1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, my work load stresses me out:
1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, I feel am always stressed out:
1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

As a teacher at Valley High School, I feel am completely burnt-out:
1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Neither Agree or Disagree
4) Agree
5) Strongly Agree

Please complete this sentence:

As a teacher at Valley High School, the #1 “issue” that frustrates me, and causes me stress is_____________________________________________________________.
Adapted from:

Appendix D: Invitation Letter and Consent

Valley High School
6300 Ehrhardt Avenue
Sacramento, CA  95823
(916) 689-6500
Fax (916) 682-1528

November 1, 2011

Dear Drexel University IRB Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I approve of Mohammad Warrad conducting his doctoral research on Teacher Burnout at Valley High School. Mohammad and I have reviewed his research purpose, research design, research methodology and data collection process. I recognize that Mohammad will be working with Valley High School teachers in a one on one, confidential manner. I also recognize that Mohammad will be using public records to access Valley High School demographic information. Mohammad has ensured me that all Valley High School staff and personnel who choose to participate in his research will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Keven MacDonald, Principal
Valley High School
Drexel University

Consent to Take Part In a Research Study

1. Subject name ____________________________

2. Title of Research: Teacher Burnout: Causes and Projected Preventive and Curative Interventions

3. Primary Investigator: W. Edward Bureau, PhD Co-Investigator’s Name: Mohammad Warrad

4. Research Entity: This research is being done by Drexel University

5. Consenting for the Research Study: This is a long and an important document. If you sign it, you will be authorizing Drexel University and its researchers to perform research studies on you. You should take your time and carefully read it. You can also take a copy of this consent form to discuss it with your family member, physician, attorney or anyone else you would like before you sign it. Do not sign it unless you are comfortable in participating in this study.

6. Purpose of Research: The purpose of this mixed methods study is to discover how Valley High School teachers describe teacher burnout. Valley High School teachers will also be asked to describe what contributing elements lead to teacher burnout, and what support will best alleviate or prevent burnout from setting-in. The significance of this study is that it will provide Valley High School teachers with a support structure. Providing support structures to Valley High School teachers will help alleviate and stop burnout. The support structure is directed towards helping Valley High School teachers participate in an action-based professional development workshop. The professional development workshop will provide much needed support and mentoring, as well as professional development. This study of teacher burnout at Valley High School is important, because students depend on healthy, energized, mentally stable, and creative teachers to educate them to high levels of success. The nature of this problem is that it is rooted within the classrooms of teachers at Valley High School. This problem must be addressed in order to support teachers in their efforts to educate students.

7. Procedures and Duration: The mixed methods study consists of a survey of the entire professional teaching staff at Valley High School, the results of which will be analyzed quantitatively. From the qualitative research domain data collection methods used will be field observation and interviews of six teachers willing to participate in this phase of the research. The duration of data collection is approximately three months. Tasks to be completed in the data collection phase are:
• Solicitation of participants via an emailed invitation
• Application of the general survey instrument (approximately 30 minutes needed for an individual to complete)
• Identification of six teachers to participate in the field observation and interviews phases
• Field observations will last for the duration of one class period in the bell schedule. The participant may be asked for more than one but no more than three such collections to occur.
• Interviews will last for approximately one hour and will be conducted in a private setting. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.
• After data analysis for this research project is concluded, all data will be securely destroyed.

8. **Risks and Discomfort/Constraints:** Risks for a protocol of this nature are minimal; however, should you feel at any point reservations, you should contact the researcher immediately. What you choose to share with the researcher during the survey, interview, or observation phases are entirely at your discretion. The researcher has in place and can describe to you means for protecting your identity and shared data.

9. **Unforeseen Risks:** Participation in this study may involve unforeseen risks. If an unforeseen risk should occur, they will be reported to the Office of Regulatory Research Compliance.

10. **Benefits:** The anticipated benefits of this study is that it will provide Valley High School teachers with a support structure. Providing support structures to Valley High School teachers will help alleviate and stop burnout. The support structure is directed towards helping Valley High School teachers participate in an action-based professional development workshop. The professional development workshop will provide much needed support and mentoring, as well as professional development. This study of teacher burnout at Valley High School is important, because students depend on healthy, energized, mentally stable, and creative teachers to educate them to high levels of success. The nature of this problem is that it is rooted within the classrooms of teachers at Valley High School. This problem must be addressed in order to support teachers in their efforts to educate students.

11. **Alternative Procedures:** This is not a treatment study. The alternative is not to participate in this study.

12. **Reasons for Removal from Study:** You may be required to stop the study before the end for any of the following reasons:
• If all or part of the study is discontinued for any reason by the sponsor, investigator, university authorities, or government agencies; or
• Other reasons, including new information available to the investigator or harmful unforeseen reactions experienced by the subject or other subjects in this study.
13. **Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to be in the study or you may stop at any time during the study without the loss of the care benefits to which you are entitled. However, you will be expected to follow the instructions provided by the research staff in order to ensure your safety and privacy at the level you wish.

14. **Responsibility of Cost:** There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

15. **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way and only the researcher will know your identity. The researcher will store all digital data in password protected electronic files accessible to only the researcher. Any hard-copy materials with identifying information will be stored in a locked fireproof safe. Once the study is complete, all transcripts and recordings will be destroyed. The anticipated end of the program is July 2012. As per Drexel university guidelines, a copy of this informed consent form will be kept with the PI for three years following the completion of the study.

16. **New Information:** If new information becomes known that will affect you or might change your decision to be in this study the investigator will inform you.

17. **Questions:** If you have any questions about this study or your participation in this study, contact:
   - W. Edward Bureau, PhD, Principal Investigator, at 215-847-8183.

Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all of your questions. If you agree to participate in this study, you will receive a signed and dated copy of this consent form for your records.

18. **Other Considerations:** If you wish further information regarding your rights as a research subject or if you have problems with a research-related injury, for medical problems please contact the Institution's Office of Regulatory Research Compliance by telephoning 215-255-7857.

19. **Consent**
   - I have been informed of the reasons for this study.
   - I have had the study explained to me.
   - I have had all of my questions answered.
I have carefully read this consent form, have initialed each page, and have received a signed copy.
I give consent voluntarily.

I freely consent to participate in this research study.

___________________________________________
Subject

___________________________________________
Date

List of Individuals Authorized to Obtain Consent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Day Phone #</th>
<th>24 Hr Phone #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad Warrad</td>
<td>Co-investigator</td>
<td>(916) 689-6500</td>
<td>(916) 812-7512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ONLY THOSE INDIVIDUALS NAMED ABOVE MAY CONDUCT THE CONSENT PROCESS AND SIGN THE CONSENT FORM.**
Appendix E: Survey Protocol Results

Quantitative Data Collection Tool: Teacher Burnout Scale Survey

Descriptive Data

1. As a teacher at Valley High School, the professional relationship I have with the Principal stresses me out: **Depersonalization**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>31/78 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15/78 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>15/78 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17/78 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0/78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. As a teacher at Valley High School, my professional relationships with the administration team stress me out: **Depersonalization**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>19/78 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18/78 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>18/78 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>14/78 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>9/78 (12%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. As a teacher at Valley High School, the shortages of resource materials I receive stress me out: **Decreased Accomplishments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count (Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>9/78 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>16/78 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>12/78 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>27/78 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>14/78 (18%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. As a teacher at Valley High School, the level of autonomy and power I have stress me out: **Emotional Exhaustion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count (Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>15/78 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>29/78 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>16/78 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18/78 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0/78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. As a teacher at Valley High School, formal observations stress me out:

**Emotional Exhaustion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>10/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>21/79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>16/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>20/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>11/78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. As a teacher at Valley High School, California Standardized Testing (CST) stresses me out: **Decreased Accomplishments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>11/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>13/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>28/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>11/78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. As a teacher at Valley High School, student behavior and discipline issues stress me out: **Emotional Exhaustion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count (Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>11/78 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11/78 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>17/78 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24/78 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>15/78 (19%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. As a teacher at Valley High School, the lack of academic freedom I have stresses me out: **Decreased Accomplishments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count (Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>9/78 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>22/78 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>8/78 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2/78 (.02%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2/78 (.02%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. As a teacher at Valley High School, my work load stresses me out: **Emotional Exhaustion**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>12/78 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>12/78 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>11/78 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>30/78 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>13/78 (17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. As a teacher at Valley High School, I feel am always stressed out: **Emotional Exhaustion**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>18/78 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>17/78 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>21/78 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>10/78 (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. As a teacher at Valley High School, I feel am completely burnt-out: **Burnout**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>19/78 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18/78 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>8/78 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. As a teacher at Valley High School, the #1 “issue” that frustrates me, and causes me stress is:

Student discipline issues
Lack of student effort/skills
District political issues: contract, funding, pink slips

**Ages:**
- 20-30: 3
- 31-40: 30
- 41-50: 40
- 51-60: 4
- 61+: 1

**100% participation rate (78/78)**