

TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOLS:
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THREE
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

By

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The purpose of this research was to examine rural middle school teacher's perceptions of stressful factors present in their current position. Data was gathered from 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teachers in the city and county schools located in O County, Mississippi. Two instruments were used for the study. The first survey instrument identified three stress factors (teacher workload, student discipline, and No Child Left Behind) and their relationship with teachers. The second instrument measured the degree to which the three stress factors were appraised as stressful. The data gathered in this study provided an awareness of factors that can increase understanding of teacher stress levels. The discussion of stress emphasized that what is perceived as stressful for one person may not be perceived as stressful for another. Results revealed that these teachers face some difficulties at their schools and in the classroom dealing with their emotional

perspective or from the perspective of the children they teach. Furthermore, results indicated that rural schools offer a less stressful learning environment than urban schools. Just knowing some of the common stress factors can assist school systems and administrators in developing interventions to alleviate stress that may at some point lead to burnout.

DEDICATION

“What is impossible with men is possible with God.” (Luke 18:27).

As a child of the Most High God, I am not limited by what I see. I am not limited by my circumstances or what others say because with God all things are possible! With my attitude of faith and expectancy I dedicate my dissertation work to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, my family, and many friends who have supported me throughout the process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What is stress and what does it mean? Of even more consequence--why is stress so pertinent to the teaching process? In itself, stress is neither good nor bad; it depends on the results of an individual's perceptions and behaviors (Swick, 1989). Stress is defined by a person's affective reactions to a specific situation or series of related events. Stress also emphasizes the relationship between the person and the environment, and includes the characteristics of the person and the nature of the environmental event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addition, the history of the person's stress response has much to do with his or her way of dealing with stress. An event that may be stress-producing for one person may be viewed as challenging by another (Kerr, 1988; Swick, 1989).

Teachers and administrators often report high levels of stress, sometimes referred to as burnout. Burnout is a distinctive level of stress that slows down the person's ability to function effectively because the body's resources for resisting stress have become exhausted. Many individuals in the helping professions or human services (i.e. social workers, nurses etc.) are particularly prone to stress and burnout (Skillern, Richardson, Wallman, Prickett, & Marion, 1990).

Johnson et al. (2005) published a survey on occupational stress. Their study compared the experiences of occupational stress across a large and diverse set of occupations by evaluating three stress related variables (psychological well-being, physical health, and job satisfaction). They ranked teaching as the second most stressful job out of 26 occupations analyzed, surpassed only by ambulance drivers. However, teachers face unique circumstances. The overpowering combination of overcrowded classrooms, testing pressures, paperwork, anxious parents, and rambunctious students, have put teachers at a particularly high risk of stress (Crute, 2004). Consequently, increased levels of stress in the teaching profession may lead to ineffective delivery of services, exhaustion, physical complaints, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

More specifically, according to the National Union of Teachers (2006), recent evidence has shown that the main sources of the current high levels of teacher stress include excessive workload and working hours that are often intensified by government initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind; poor pupil behavior that is compounded by issues such as large class sizes; pressures of assessment targets and inspections; pressure by administrators; and lack of professional development opportunities. Current research has not sought to explore the main sources of current high levels of teacher stress recognized in middle school teachers.

Middle school teachers have the added challenge of working with students who are in early adolescence. According to Petzko (2002), adolescents are filled with erratic growth spurts, wide variation in cognitive development, unpredictable emotions, and dominating social needs, all of which can impact the student and the teacher. Petzko

(2002) also acknowledged that middle school teachers must have the knowledge and skills to use instructional procedures and modalities to assure content mastery for every student. Middle school youth must adapt to many more classes, teachers, peers, and pressures than they had in elementary school (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992). Also, relationships with adults at this age, especially with parents and teachers, are difficult, and peer relationships tend to be closer than they were in childhood (Adams & Gullotta, 1990; Montemayor & Flannery, 1990). What remains to be determined is if the culture of the middle school, in the areas of adolescent development and curriculum and instruction, has any influence on the stress levels of middle school teachers.

Reglin and Reitzammer (1998) assessed the vulnerability of teachers to stress based upon grade level and school location. They concluded that by being aware of the level of vulnerability to stress and then pursuing a plan to reduce vulnerability, teachers can better cope with their daily stressful routines. For teachers who are vulnerable, their stress gets worse and usually leads to burnout. These researchers concluded further that elementary school teachers reported a moderate vulnerability to stress and middle school and junior high school teachers revealed serious vulnerability to stress, whereas the non-classroom category reported a low vulnerability to stress. As far as location, rural teachers reported a moderate vulnerability to stress, while urban teachers reported a serious vulnerability.

Stress is an ongoing problem and affects the actions of teachers on a professional and personal level. The physical, mental, and emotional well-being of each teacher is influenced by the amount of stress he or she perceives in a given situation. Stress,

therefore, is a somewhat subjective concept, depending on how each person perceives the situation encountered (Skillern et al., 1990).

Teachers' self-perceptions may have a direct impact on their satisfaction, and subsequently their long lasting stress and/or burnout in the field. Teachers may use stress as a positive part of their personal and professional growth when they look at their own experiences. Also, eventually stress can be a force for improving their lives. As their responsibilities and accountability for student performance increase, so does the need for research on teacher stress and its sources (Dunham, 1992). Therefore, this research is needed to examine specific sources of stress that middle school teachers may be facing to determine whether or not these sources affect the stress level of these teachers. The ultimate challenge is for middle school teachers to understand stress and take appropriate actions to grow from their stressful experiences.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of stress has been the topic of a great deal of research throughout the years. In the 1960s and 1970s, research concluded that stress occurs when individuals perceive that they cannot cope with the demands from their internal or external environment. Specifically, these demands may upset their sense of balance and affect their psychological and physiological state, requiring action to restore the balance (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). Teachers' belief in their own ability to perform their required duties, including increasing student achievement, may be a major factor in their own feelings of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

The present study explored teacher stress through perceptions of how teachers' viewed themselves and their workload, student discipline and behavior problems in the classroom, and issues associated with the No Child Left Behind Act. The researcher's goal was to obtain from teachers their own feelings about their job and what they found stressful and not stressful relating to contributing factors on their job. The researcher's discussion of stress emphasized that what is perceived as stressful for one person may not be perceived as stressful for another.

Purpose of the Study

Teachers face multiple demands in the classroom, many of which are viewed as sources of stress. The demands can come from people and events around the teacher, as well as from their inner thoughts and struggles. When these demands increase, teachers often perceive that they are under excessive stress (Skillern et al., 1990).

Despite the large number of teacher stressors cited in the literature, there are several stressors that seem to reoccur in the research, regardless of when or where the research was conducted. These stressors include student misbehavior, poor relationship with colleagues, principals and parents, time management, lack of influence, lack of professional recognition, salary received, poor school climate and poor environment, work overload, recent changes in education, staff shortages, and job insecurity (Beer & Beer, 1992; Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995; Montalvo, Bair, & Boor, 1995; Solman & Feld, 1989; Tellenback, Brenner, & Lofgren, 1983; Travers & Cooper, 1996; Whitehead & Ryba, 1995). Research also identified three contributing factors (teacher workload, high student discipline and interaction problems, and the No Child Left Behind

Act) as some of the top stressors of teachers (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Farber, 1984a; Farber, 1984b; Friesen & Williams, 1985; Gordon, 2002; Greenlee & Ogletree, 1993; Litt & Turk, 1985; McCormick & Solman, 1992; Payne & Furnham, 1987; Yeh, 2006). The current study focused on the top stressors of teachers experienced by middle school teachers and the significant effects that these challenges have had on their work and/or their working situation. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine rural middle school teacher's perceptions of stressful factors present in their current position.

Significance of the Study

There are several reasons for the high level of interest in teacher stress. First, the teaching profession is one of the largest and most visible professions in the United States. Second, the teaching profession has been subject to increased pressure by society to correct social problems (e.g., drug, alcohol, and sexual abuse), educate students in academic and skill areas, provide enrichment activities, meet the individual needs of all students with a wide range of abilities, and encourage moral and ethical development. Third, many teachers are leaving the profession because of stress and burnout, while fewer are choosing to become teachers, and the results have seen teacher shortages in certain disciplines and predictions of future shortages in all areas (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

Other factors responsible for teacher stress include school violence, vandalism of school property, disruptive students, inadequate salaries, and changing student and community attitudes toward educators (Gold, 2001). Gold presented more factors that included collective bargaining issues, repeated layoffs of professional staff, poor

relationships within the schools, and lack of job mobility. Add to these stressors the everyday responsibilities of educating students and providing an effective learning environment, and it becomes obvious that teachers have to be capable of coping with a great deal of stress (Skillern et al., 1990). Not only are teachers expected to perform too many roles, but also the roles are often intentionally left unclear. Further, some roles like discipline and nurturance of student self-concept can overload teachers with stress (Swick, 1989).

There are numerous research studies in the areas of understanding and preventing teacher burnout and/or teacher stress, teacher burnout and attrition among U.S. teachers, why public school teachers leave their profession, and teacher perceptions of the importance of factors in the decision to leave a teaching position. While there is research that connects teacher morale and/or job satisfaction to teacher turnover, more research was conducted to determine what, if any, relationship exists between teacher job satisfaction and teacher turnover. For example, Barth (1999) and Shen (1997) argued that increased teacher empowerment would promote teacher retention. Their findings suggest that there was a need to take a closer look at how satisfaction with the school cultures influenced the empowerment experienced by teachers. They found that teachers who worked in supportive environments contributed greatly to reform efforts within the school. These teachers who worked in supportive environments are noteworthy given the high levels of burnout and attrition in the teaching profession (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). Also, Scott and Wimbush (1991) studied teacher absenteeism in secondary schools. Scott and Wimbush utilized a model in which the major components consisted of “attendance motivation” and “perceived ability to attend.” Job satisfaction

was the single most important factor affecting attendance motivation. Other employee attitudes that were related to attendance motivation were job involvement, organizational commitment, and loyalty to co-workers. In general teachers with higher job satisfaction and job involvement were absent less often (Hammond & Onikama, 1997). These findings have implications for the management of stress. However, no data was available from these studies about middle schools, particularly located in a small rural Mississippi county.

Ultimately because of the absence of empirical research and because of the importance of teacher retention and teacher effectiveness, it has become increasingly important to examine three distinct contributing factors of stress including teacher workload (excessive paperwork, increased workloads from administrators), high student discipline and student interaction problems, and issues exasperated by the No Child Left Behind Act. These factors are in line with other studies (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Farber, 1984a; Farber, 1984b; Friesen & Williams, 1985; Gordon, 2002; Greenlee & Ogletree, 1993; Litt & Turk, 1985; McCormick & Solman, 1992; Payne & Furnham, 1987; Yeh, 2006), which identified top stressors and their relationship with teachers.

Farber (1984a) administered the Teacher Attitude Survey (TAS) to 236 K-12 New York public school teachers, who reported frustrations with heavy workloads due to excessive paperwork and unsuccessful administrative meetings. Litt and Turk (1985), who administered a questionnaire to 291 American high school teachers, found that too much paperwork was one of the three specific job tensions and sources of stress for teachers. Boyle et al. (1995) evaluated the dimensions of teacher stress by using a principal components analysis where they determined that workload and student

misbehavior were the two major contributors to stress. Greenlee and Ogletree (1993) administered the Questionnaire on Teachers' Attitudes Toward Discipline Problems and Classroom Management Strategies to 50 elementary and secondary Chicago school teachers: 39 respondents believed classroom management stress and dealing with discipline issues in the classroom were the most influential factors in the failure of novice teachers. Goodman (1980) suggested that urban teachers were highly stressed due to the many problems that students bring to the classroom, and with inadequate preparation by teachers to deal with such issues in the classroom.

A survey, which was conducted for CompassLearning by the educational research organization Eduventures, found that a vast majority of K-12 teachers felt significant levels of stress. These findings were consistent regardless of grade level, location of school, or amount of previous experience. This study consisted of 514 participants from K-12 teachers across the nation. The results revealed how many teachers related to testing and skills assessments put in place nationwide by the No Child Left Behind Act. The top three stressors identified by educators in the survey were "finding the time to teach everything I want/need to cover," "providing students with individualized instruction given student-teacher ratios," and "emphasis on high-stakes testing." Survey results came from urban, suburban, and rural schools throughout every region of the nation. Teaching experience of respondents varied from less than one year to more than 20 years, and they taught in every grade, from kindergarten through high school ("K-12 Teachers Report Increasing Stress Levels", 2006).

By examining the three distinct contributing factors of stress, including teacher workload (excessive paperwork, increased workloads from administrators), high student

discipline and student interaction problems, and issues exasperated by the No Child Left Behind Act, which are identified in the literature as the top stressors by teachers, one can see the importance of this issue in the teaching profession. Increasing the awareness of these stress factors would aid school level administrators and district level supervisors in developing effective systems of support for both new and veteran teachers, thereby increasing teacher retention in rural middle school environments. Also, the teachers may gain insight into their own professional careers through the process of reflecting on experiences that will suggest and influence decisions on issues such as decision-making, classroom management, teacher preparedness, and principal support. A study of this nature will also increase an awareness concerning the degree of perceived burnout within the schools.

Research Questions

The results of this study will provide answers to the following questions:

1. Is there a relationship between teacher workload survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
2. Is there a relationship between student discipline survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
3. Is there a relationship between No Child Left Behind Act survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
4. Do rural middle school teachers in County O find their job stressful as measured by the Survey of Teachers and the Perceived Stress Scale?

5. Are there differences in the Perceived Stress Scale scores of participants, as measured by the Survey of Teachers, based on the following demographic variables: grade level that is taught, sex, age, race, highest degree obtained, total years teaching, total years teaching at current school, areas of certification, whether or not they are teaching a content area that is Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) tested, and whether or not they are National Board certified.

Definition of the Terms

The following terms will be defined for the purpose of this study:

Stress: A person's affective reactions to a specific situation or series of related events.

An event that may be stress-producing for one person may be seen as a challenge by another (Kerr, 1988; Swick, 1989).

Burnout: A state of exhaustion resulting from excessive and prolonged stress responses.

A consequence of prolonged stress (Shinhwan, 2006). Burnout is a distinctive kind of job-related stress that inhibits the person's capacity to function effectively because the body's resources for resisting stress have become exhausted (Skillern et al., 1990).

Middle school: Schools that serve students roughly between 10 and 15 years of age in grades 5-8 (Powell, 2005).

Middle level environment: Also referred to as middle-school environment. It embodies specific concepts restricted to educating adolescents (Skillern et al., 1990).

Classroom management: Maintaining an ordered environment in which learning may be accomplished in the classroom (Powell, 2005).

Rural: Open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 people—rural areas are what remain after all of the urbanized areas have been identified (United States Census Bureau, 2000). Rural relates to the country, country people, or agriculture and refers to life on the farm. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1997). Rural communities are often recognized for their low-total populations and high poverty and illiteracy rates (Holub, 1996).

Basic Assumptions of the Study

The assumptions of the study are as follows:

1. The perceptions of a sample of teachers from grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 (in a small rural Mississippi county) are representative of the perceptions of most middle level teachers in small rural counties.
2. The teachers are open and candid regarding their perceptions concerning the questions in the survey.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to teachers who are part of the city and county school districts in O County Mississippi. The researcher assumed that all teachers who participated in answering the survey questions would answer honestly. The surveys may have asked questions that could appear to overlap and/or to be interrelated. Also, results relied on self-reported data at a particular time of year as an acceptable means of assessing levels of stress.

The city and the county schools were different in many ways. Some of the city schools contained only one grade level (i.e. 6th grade had their own school, 7th and 8th

grade had their own school), whereas the county schools mixed the grade levels (i.e. 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th were located in the same school and K-6 were located in the same school). Seventhth and 8th grade teachers in the city schools worked in “teams” using the looping method in which teachers teach one grade level one year and the same set of teachers teach the same set of students the next year. In other words, if they teach 7th grade presently, then next year they will be teaching the same students in the 8th grade. Also, the state test results (based on Adequate Yearly Progress standards) for 2007-2008 school year reflected that both the city and county schools in County O were at or near the state averages, and few category results were significantly above. Also, some teachers, depending on their school districts, may have taught multiple grade levels.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Researchers have given workplace stress considerable attention over the years. There has also been an increase in the literature on teacher stress as well (Jarvis, 2002). Various studies have indicated that teachers' stress levels are higher than those of the general population. Also these studies have reported significantly higher levels of depression and job dissatisfaction with teachers than those in other professions (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). Many teachers find the demands of being a professional educator in today's schools difficult and at times stressful, which may lead to teacher burnout. When work stress results in teacher burnout, it can have serious consequences for the health and happiness of teachers and the students, professionals, and families they interact with on a daily basis (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). Many of the perceptions teachers have of their work life have a direct and powerful impact on their satisfaction and subsequently their intentions to leave. Thus some teachers cite the stressful nature of their jobs as affecting their longevity of employment (Harris, Kagay, & Leichenko, 1986). It is important to know that teacher burnout is derived from emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Also teacher burnout is a result of prolonged stress. Thus greater levels of stress (and burnout) can lead to exhaustion, physical complaints, anxiety, depression, substance abuse and inadequate delivery of services (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

Exhaustion has been identified as the leading reaction to the stress of job demands and the sense of lack of accomplishment at work. When people feel cynical, they assume a cold, distant, depersonalized attitude toward their work and the people they encounter through work. They tend to minimize their involvement at work, and even relinquish their ideals. Feelings of ineffectiveness are accompanied by a growing sense of inadequacy. They lose confidence in their ability to make a difference professionally (Friedman, 2000). Emotional exhaustion is characterized by the depletion of a teacher's emotional resources and the feeling that one has nothing left to give to others at the psychological level (Iwanicki, 2001). In the emotional scenario of a teacher, a sense of overload appears first (the consequence of various stressful events), and leads the teacher to feel that his or her job is excessively burdensome. Consequently, the teacher may feel emotionally exhausted and disappointed (Friedman, 2000).

Depersonalization may be expressed through poor attitudes towards students and the work environment. It is characterized by feelings of insensitivity towards other people (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2005). Teachers may be at greater risk for depersonalization because their daily work life often includes large doses of isolation from their professional peers. While teachers do interact with others on a regular basis throughout the workday, the majority of such interactions are with students, and not with other teachers or professional staff members who might better understand the demands teachers face. Factors such as teachers working alone in their classrooms and scheduling constraints that make finding time to meet with peers virtually impossible, can cause teachers to feel disconnected. This depersonalization may act as a protective mechanism, and these "worn-out" teachers, who now have cynical views towards students and

teaching, have allowed themselves to continue to remain in the field, even in a diminished capacity. While depersonalization may act as some protection for teachers, it also may encourage isolation, strengthening the risk for higher stress levels and teacher burnout (“Understanding and Preventing Burnout,” 2004). The depersonalization phase consists of developing negative, skeptical, and sometimes heartless attitudes toward students, parents, and colleagues (Iwanicki, 2001). Among the stressors related to teacher-student interaction, teachers have cited behavior and discipline problems, low motivation and lack of effort, a sense of responsibility regarding the future of their students, and inadequate resources (Friedman, 1995).

Reduced personal accomplishment is the feeling of no longer being effective in working with students and in fulfilling other school responsibilities (Iwanicki, 2001). The combined cognitive-emotional scenario may begin with a sense of personal unaccomplishment and overload. Stressful events, combined with high, unfulfilled expectations for self-fulfillment, produce such primary stress-inducing experiences as a sense of personal unaccomplishment and sense of overload. A sense of personal unaccomplishment combined with a feeling of overload gives rise to secondary stress-induced experiences such as a deep sense of insignificance (Friedman, 2000).

Teacher stress is a growing hazard and is linked with health problems, recruitment problems, and retention in the profession. The stressful nature of teaching has been implicated as a factor that can cause teachers to either (a) burnout and leave the profession or (b) continue to teach, but at a limited level of involvement. Teachers suffering from burnout who choose to leave the profession have been found to be among some of the most qualified teachers (Tompkins, 1995).

Numerous factors have been linked with teacher retention and attrition. Research has focused on the phenomenon of high stress levels and burnout. This leaves teachers feeling trapped in jobs they no longer like or results in teachers quitting the classroom before retirement age (Brunetti, 2001).

The National Center for Education Statistics indicates that 65% of public school teachers who left the education field felt that the workload in their new profession was more manageable. Also these teachers found it easier in their new jobs to balance their work and personal lives. The survey results, a follow up to the 2003-04 schools and staffing survey, concluded that 70% of public school teachers who moved to a different school cited dissatisfaction with workplace conditions or the administration as “very important” in their decisions to leave. Researchers surveyed 7,500 elementary and secondary teachers for the study, and the main considerations were teacher workload and work/life balance. Dissatisfaction with workplace conditions or administration also strongly affected their decisions (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006).

Borg, Riding, and Falzon (1991) reported that up to one third of teachers perceive their occupation as highly stressful. Teacher stress can lead to alienation, apathy, absenteeism, and eventually interfere with student achievement (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). Teacher stress can also affect health, well-being, and performance (Larchick & Chance, 2004).

Teacher stress is often cited as a major cause of the teacher shortage, not only because of the difficulty in recruiting new teachers, but also because of the challenge in teacher retention. Teachers are driven to leave the profession by unmet expectations, a

lack of preparation, and a lack of support from colleagues and principals. These concerns affect teacher stress, their sense of happiness, and their willingness to stay in the profession. Those who said they planned to leave were more likely to report unfulfilled expectations when it came to prestige, salary, and benefits of teaching. They were also more likely to say they felt unprepared to work with children of varying needs and to work for principals who did not ask for their input, show appreciation for their work, or treat them with respect (Greifner, 2006). Teachers are at risk for higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of job satisfaction (Schonfeld, 1990; Travers & Cooper, 1993).

Tompkins (1995) developed a profile of teacher leavers, using data from the National Center for Education Statistics. She suggested that only a cluster of five attitudinal questions might be helpful indicators. In effect, a teacher's responses to these questions might reveal the extent to which he or she is beginning to feel that the costs of staying in teaching have reached the point at which they outweigh the benefits. For example, one of the five items was "For me, the job of teaching has more advantages than disadvantages." A respondent who disagreed with this statement might, according to Tompkins, be at risk of high levels of stress and burnout. If the same person were also to agree with the statement, "If I had the chance to exchange my job as a teacher for another kind of job, I would," it might conclude that this person may be experiencing burnout --or may be worn out and unhappy with job conditions that drain energy and dampen enthusiasm on a daily basis (Tye & O'Brien, 2002).

The problem of high teacher attrition plagues rural school districts and has emerged as a critical issue. These studies analyzed this critical issue. One study

conducted by The American Association of School Administrators (as cited in Collins, 1999) analyzed survey data to determine the most significant problem facing rural school districts recruiting and retaining quality teachers. Another study by Frantz (1994) found that rural schools lose teachers at a much higher rate than their urban and suburban counterparts. Teacher attrition not only affects the environment where the teachers work, but it also impacts the stability of a school district. The rural school districts with high attrition must put their resources to the recruitment of new teachers, rather than using it toward professional development and opportunities to increase student achievement. As a result of this, data on attrition amongst teachers often includes relationships with stress.

The causes of job dissatisfaction with classroom teaching are systemic rather than personal. The fact that people react in their own ways to a stressful environment usually generates focus on the effect rather than on the cause, on the pain of the individual rather than on the structural and organizational causes of that pain. Classroom teachers are especially prone to locating the problem within themselves--first, because in their preparation programs they are not usually taught to recognize how the system works, and second, because in the course of a typical workweek they do not have time to talk to one another to see that others feel much the same way that they do. If teachers discuss their feelings with one another, they seldom acknowledge the larger and systemic causes of their dwindling job satisfaction (Tye & O'Brien, 2002).

The literature provides some evidence of understanding teacher stress and burnout, teacher retention, and teacher perceptions of the factors that lead to teacher attrition. Researchers suggested several contributing factors to the stress levels of teachers as critical in teacher burnout. Thus the sources of teacher stress have been

investigated at length. The body of literature on teacher stress seems to be growing, with a particular emphasis on its sources and effects (Attridge, Bergmark, Parker, & Lapp, 2000; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998).

According to Friedman and Farber (1992), pressures experienced by teachers were the result of a variety of sources. Stress depended on a person's cognitive perception of circumstances and the ability to cope with those circumstances (Abel & Sewell, 1999). Bertoch, Nielson, Curley, and Borg (1988) suggested that stress operates in many dimensions and is not always predictable. Goodman (1980) and Schnacke (1982) identified stressors that appear in various studies and categorized the stressors as environmental and personality-induced. Environmental stressors included student discipline and attitude problems, teacher capability and experience, and teacher-administrator relations. Personality-induced stressors were those related to the individual's self-perception. This sometimes included negative self-perceptions and life experiences, low morale, and a struggle to maintain personal and professional standards in the classroom. These views of stress and the identification of stressors suggest that the issue of teacher stress and burnout is highly complex when viewed from various stages in each teacher (Schnacke, 1982).

Public demands for the accountability of teachers' workload and productivity have become pronounced policy debates, adding to the existing pressures on teacher time and performance. Despite these increased pressures, there continues to be limited understanding, at a national level, regarding the impact these professional and institutional issues have on teachers' satisfaction, and subsequently, on their intentions to leave their the teaching profession (Rosser, 2004).

Bertoch et al. (1988) also uncovered the issue of accountability and how it became a major area of concern for many teachers. Accountability was defined as expectations of performance and preparedness established by state and federal governments (United States Department of Education, 2008). Still other researchers have referred to class size, low salaries, declining community support, student violence, administrative insensitivity, and school culture as other notable factors of stress for teachers (Blasé, Dedrick, & Strathe, 1986; Brown & Ralph, 1992; Burke & Greenglass, 1988; Cooper & Kelly, 1993; Farber, 1984a; Farber, 1984b; Friedman, 1991; Olander & Farrell, 1970; Otto, 1986).

This chapter presents the research literature in the present study. The literature supports arguments that teachers perceive their positions as very stressful due to challenges they face. This chapter is divided into sections based on the top stressors of teachers. The first is the heavy workload that teachers have on a daily basis. Heavy workload may include (but is not limited to) excessive paperwork, unfair workloads, resources and supplies, and increased workloads for administrators. The second is that of student discipline and student interaction problems in the classroom. The third top stressor consists of issues exasperated by No Child Left Behind. This review concludes with a summary of existing literature and a discussion of the specific research questions suggested by the review and examined in this dissertation.

Teacher Workload

Workload is an important factor that affects teachers' stress. Teacher workload includes, but is not limited to, the amount of time spent working, the number of classes

taught, and the number of students in each class (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). In the mid 1990's, full-time public school teachers were required to be at school for an average of 33 hours per week; however, they also worked an average of 12 additional hours per week before and after school and on weekends. Teachers spent an average of three hours in activities involving students, and nine hours in other school-related work, such as grading papers, preparing lessons, and meeting with parents. The average was similar whether they worked at the elementary or secondary school level (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). The extent of teacher workload definitely has an influence on teacher attrition and the stress levels of teachers. The number of hours that a teacher puts into his or her job is included in teacher workload and is likely to be related to that teacher's sense of fatigue, boredom, and stress. Maslach (1976) revealed that longer working hours are correlated with more stress and negative attitudes only when these hours involve continuous and direct contact with the person's clients (students).

Friesen and Williams (1985) studied work-related stress with teachers and their perceptions of major sources of work-related stress. They also assessed the degree to which stressors accounted for the overall stress on the job. Friesen and Williams (1985) concluded that teachers do not have enough time for uninterrupted teaching, preparation, meetings with peers, and breaks from work. They also suggested that teacher workload and lack of sufficient time to complete it affects teacher behavior and student learning. Correspondingly, the tremendous amount of paper work required of teachers and the lack of supplemental resources are known as top contributors to the stress levels of teachers (Carlson & Thompson, 1995).

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) indicated that conditions of work rather than the experience of teaching might provide the sources of stress that most strongly contribute to job dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction may, in turn, burden teachers with fatigue, headaches, indigestion and other ailments ultimately generating excess stress. Ultimately, educators are under tension generated by the work demands of today's classrooms and find it difficult to meet their own personal standards of teaching (Miller, 1979). Thus, in addition to the anxiety created by the often-unreasonable work demands of the job, the teachers' dissatisfaction with themselves adds to their frustration and stress.

This literature search revealed that there are a number of assignments that are given to teachers in the classroom that are aggravating and may cause frustrations and stress. Huling-Austin, Odell, Isher, Kay, and Edeldelt (1989) wrote the following about the experience of first-year teachers:

Beginning teachers are often given teaching assignments that would challenge even the most skillful veteran teachers. Such assignments can take several forms: teaching in a subject area for which the teacher is not certified; having too many class preparations; "floating" from classroom to classroom; working with low-ability, unmotivated, or disruptive students; or being responsible for demanding or time-consuming extracurricular activities. (p. 42)

These teachers are given unreasonable teaching assignments that may bring on frustrations and stress (Brock & Grady, 2001; Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999; Johnson & Carey-Webb, 1999; Wise, Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Klein, 1987). Darling-Hammond (1998) further explains:

Most U.S. teachers start their careers in disadvantaged schools where turnover is highest, are assigned the most educationally needy students whom no one else wants to teach, are given the most demanding teaching loads with the greatest number of extra duties, and receive few curriculum materials and no mentoring. After this hazing, many leave. Others learn merely to cope rather than to teach well. (p.10)

Thus novice teachers' responsibilities are not added as they gradually increase their teaching skills and knowledge. Instead, these novice teachers must learn while they are performing the teaching duties (Lortie, 1975), therefore producing feelings in some teachers that they are being treated unfairly.

Specific studies have raised important issues regarding first-year teachers' number of classes they teach, floating classrooms, and teaching outside their area of expertise, which all are integrated under teacher workload. One study in particular, (Andrews & Quinn, 2004), examined frustrations of first-year middle school and high school teachers in a K–12 school district. Some of these teachers taught in schools with high-achieving, high socioeconomic populations, while others taught in schools comprised of at-risk populations. The school district had an overall student population of almost 60,000 and included 11 middle schools and 13 high schools. The results of this study confirmed that the occurrence of floating, teaching out of the area of expertise, and having too many preparations, still occur for secondary first-year teachers in this district and concluded that these occurrences are unacceptable and that efforts should be made to reduce these frustrations for these teachers in their schools.

There are also studies that focus solely on the workload of kindergarten through secondary school teachers. Farber (1984a) administered the Teacher Attitude Survey (TAS) to 236 K-12 New York public school teachers, who reported heavy workloads due to excessive paperwork and unsuccessful administrative meetings. Also, Litt and Turk (1985), who administered a questionnaire to 291 American high school teachers, found that too much paperwork was one of the three specific job tensions.

Most researchers on the subject of teacher stress acknowledged that the stress of teachers is multidimensional with a variety of stressors contributing to the overall stress of teachers. Moses and Delaney (1970) conducted a study that determined the pressures placed on teachers. Findings showed that if teachers feel numerous pressures and stress, they almost certainly pass those feelings of tension and anxieties on to their students (Fantini & Wernstein, 1968; Lemaster, 1981).

Finally, assessment workload was also included in teacher workload research. It involved the additional responsibility of administering and preparing students for school-wide student assessments (Smith & Bourke, 1992). The other types of workload included administrative, teaching, and resources. Administrative workload referred to responsibilities and duties of teachers outside of the classroom such as recess duty or serving as hall monitor (Smith & Bourke). Teaching workload indicated the responsibilities related to actual teaching of students (Smith & Bourke). Finally, resources workload included work related to finding, developing, and producing teacher curriculum, lesson plans, and related materials. Resources workload may include bulletin boards and classroom decorations (Smith & Bourke).

According to Bubb and Earley (2004), excessive workloads mean teachers suffer greater levels of stress than comparable occupational groups. Their research claims that a quarter of teachers' work takes place outside working hours with teaching accounting for only two-fifths of their work. Their research also claims that secondary teachers work on average 50.8 hours compared to primary teachers who work on average 53.9 hours. Bubb and Earley concluded that these excessive hours had a damaging effect on teachers' home life, made recruitment and retention of teachers increasingly difficult and lead to stress-related illness.

One of the biggest hurdles that US teachers face is a lack of effective educational resources. This lack of resources is a burden for teachers considering they are held accountable for progressively higher expectations of performance in their classrooms (Zarske, Sullivan, Carlson, & Yowell, 2004). With the addition of standards-based teaching and performance testing, today's teachers also feel the pressure of implementing quality lessons in the classroom within strict time constraints. Not only is the number of qualified teachers in short supply, often they are expected to teach subjects outside their area of expertise. For example, teachers in science and technology classrooms, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, regularly report a lack of confidence in their ability to teach those subjects and seek content-specific professional development opportunities to enhance their classroom success (Zarske et al., 2004).

Additionally, the issue of rural schools may come into play during this research because the participants in this study are all teachers from a small rural county. Workload is different at rural (country) schools compared to urban (city) schools. Issues of funding may be a top priority at these small rural schools and sometimes these schools may need

extra money to cover costs when faced with many existing pressures. These issues may not be as important in urban schools that may sometimes have outside resources or sponsors to contribute to their financial needs.

Rural school districts tend to experience teacher shortage problems and attrition. They have difficulty getting top candidates and have high rates of attrition. Rural districts face significant problems replacing effective teachers that leave with qualified teachers. Frantz (1994; as cited by Mulvihill, 2007) determined that rural school districts experience higher rates of attrition than suburban districts due to a variety of factors, including working conditions such as teaching out of assignment (which is included in teacher workload), and limited professional development. This study was reinforced by Haun and Martin (2004). Haun and Martin also did a study on the attrition in rural school districts. They used a mixed method approach with 400 teacher participants. These researchers found that rural school districts experienced greater attrition rates (17%) than suburban (15%) and urban (4%) districts. Another researcher, Collins (1999) stated that rural administrators experience difficulty finding qualified teachers who will integrate into the school community and remain in their teaching assignment. Reasons for this difficulty in hiring may stem from the fact that some teachers realize that they do not fit into the culture of their new rural communities. The teachers think that they cannot relate to the students in their expected manner. For this reason, rural administrators often hire teachers from rural backgrounds who understand the expectations and the culture of the community. In turn, this may significantly reduce the pool of highly qualified candidates who want to teach (Mulvihill, 2007).

Administrative workload duties associated with teacher workload are also pertinent in rural school districts when it comes to job satisfaction and teacher attrition. These rural school districts encounter factors outside of the classroom that impact the retention of staff. The Miller and Sidebottom (1985) study (as cited in Mulvihill, 2007) examined suburban districts that surround the rural schools and how they frequently lure away top candidates with higher salaries and more career opportunities. In rural areas, this is not possible because university partnerships and opportunities for professional development may be limited, thus increasing the frustration for teachers in meeting certification requirements (Collins, 1999). Young teachers may experience difficulty in finding adequate housing and transportation because of limited income. These external influences are often beyond the control of the local classrooms and school districts.

Studies have indicated that many good teachers are leaving, before they have hardly begun, with many leaving due to dissatisfaction with their jobs. When the National Center for Education Statistics (2000) asked teachers what factors influenced their decision to leave, the 2000–01 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) also asked them how satisfied they were with various features of the school they left. The five most commonly reported sources of dissatisfaction among teachers who transferred to another school were lack of planning time (65 %), too heavy a workload (60 %), too low a salary (54 %), problematic student behavior (53 %), and a lack of influence over school policy (52 %). Among teachers who left, the five most commonly reported sources of dissatisfaction were a lack of planning time (60 %), too heavy a workload (51 %), too many students in a classroom (50 %), too low a salary (48 %), and problematic student behavior (44 %). Examining the sources of dissatisfaction out-of-field teachers and highly qualified

teachers who quit teaching reveals that a greater percentage of out-of-field teachers than highly qualified teachers reported dissatisfaction with salary (62 vs. 42%), while a greater percentage of highly qualified teachers than of out-of-field teachers reported dissatisfaction with lack of planning time (64 vs. 49%; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). In essence, both teachers who left teaching and teachers who transferred at the end of 1999–2000 reported a lack of planning time and too heavy a workload, among their top five sources of dissatisfaction within their schools.

Additional research revealed that teachers felt incompetent as their daily duties began to integrate with technology. For many, it was difficult to meet new technological expectations and perform regular classroom duties (Fimian & Sartoro, 1983). This sometimes caused teachers to view teaching as a career with limited opportunities for advancement and many were overwhelmed and stressed as a result (Huston, 2001).

Research has shown that teachers have many obstacles to deal with on a daily basis that can be strenuous over the duration of their job incumbencies. Some teachers have too much work, while others have less to do. Increasingly, curriculum assessment, student testing and reporting regimes are being imposed by central departments of education, and provisions for teachers to engage in formal training sessions to help understand and implement these initiatives has been uneven (Smaller, Hart, Clark, & Livingstone, 2001). These differences in workload may create an environment of inconsistency and has the potential to produce feelings in some teachers that they are being treated unfairly. The strain results from the combination of the aspects of workloads and may have alluded to gaps in previous studies that consider stress-inducing effects on job demands that may lead to burnout in some cases.

Student Discipline

Classroom management and discipline appear to be sources of stress for teachers in terms of students' behaviors, attitudes, and lack of motivation for learning (Gordon, 2002). In the classroom teachers are more critical and punitive in nature when they are interacting with their students, due to high levels of stress (Coie & Koepl, 1990). Dependency and conflict in teacher-student relationships contributed to negative school attitude and school avoidance (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Gold and Roth (1993) believed that stress in itself is neutral, but the teacher's perceptions are the key to negative stress response. The job and profession do not elicit stress; it is the person's reaction to the job and its requirements that create stress (Greenberg, 1984).

The demands of controlling the classroom environment can create excessive drain on the emotional strength of a teacher. This sometimes may lead to burnout in the profession (Bonfadini, 1993). Thus, the teacher who is burned out is less responsive to students, experiences fatigue and exhaustion physically and emotionally, and is more easily agitated, frustrated and stressed (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990).

The 36th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools identified "lack of discipline" as one of the most serious problems facing the nation's educational system (Rose & Gallup, 2004). Many teachers and students were also concerned about the danger in school environments. These dangers may include drug use, cheating, insubordination, truancy, and intimidation and may result in school and classroom disruptions that can lead to suspension (Rose & Gallup). In addition to these school discipline issues, classrooms are plagued with student misbehavior which disrupts the flow of classroom activities and interferes with learning (Cotton, 1990).

Students' misbehavior and classroom discipline problems have been consistently associated with teacher stress (Yoon, 2002). Student attitudes and behaviors were key stress factors for music teachers (Heston, Dedrick, Raschke, & Whitehead, 1996). The students' lack of interest (Brown, 1987; Hamann, 1985; Mercer & Mercer, 1986); disruptive behavior and violence (O'Hair, 1995); and negative attitudes and inappropriate behavior directly impacted classroom activity and learning, and contributed to teacher stress (Brown, 1987; Gordon, 1997; Heston et al., 1996).

Some literature linked teacher workload and student discipline problems. Boyle et al. (1995) revealed that student misbehavior and teacher workload accounted for most of the consistency in predicting teacher stress and were the two major contributors to teacher stress. These student misbehaviors included noisy difficult pupils, lack of class discipline, pupil impoliteness/poor attitudes, and problems in managing additional children.

Yoon (2002) discovered that negative teacher-student relationships were predicted by teacher stress. He found that the more stress interactions with a particular student or group of students increased for a teacher, the more negative and unpredictable a teacher's response became. Thus, these negative patterns of communication between the teacher and the student contributed to increased tension and unsatisfactory relationships in the classroom. For that reason, many teachers maintained negative school attitudes and thus avoided school (Birch & Ladd, 1997). These factors were supported by increased classroom discipline problems for teachers and requests for substitute teachers (Wiley, 2000; Yoon, 2002).

Friedman (1995) examined how the behavior patterns of students contributed to predicting teacher stress and burnout. The teacher and student survey results indicated that student behavior had different effects on how the teacher functioned within the school culture. He discovered that teacher tolerance of student misbehaviors depended on the particular classroom management style utilized by the teacher. He also concluded that the teacher perceived the student's misbehavior as stressful if a fit was not made between a teacher's particular classroom management style and a specific type of student misbehavior. Evidence was found that teachers exposed to similar types of student misbehaviors perceived these student misbehaviors differently depending on the teacher's classroom management style. The study resulted in teachers appearing to differ in their levels of stress and burnout when confronted with similar types of student misbehaviors depending on the fit and match between the student's misbehavior and the teacher's style of classroom management.

A study by Gordon (2002) examined whether classroom management and discipline were stressful for music educators and identified those elements that were particular stressors associated with discipline. The study used a mixed methodology approach with 103 practicing music teachers participating in the quantitative element and four practicing teachers serving as case-study participants for the qualitative component. The findings suggested that behavior and attitudes of students; constancy of discipline; irritable, negative or uncooperative students, teachers, and parents; and insufficient preparation time were noted by the study participants as being stressful. The case-study participants also suggested that student's apathy, behaviors, attitudes, and lack of motivation to learn were pervasive stressors. According to Pithers (1995), stress was

caused by interpersonal demands, the various tasks required for teaching, a lack of professional recognition, and problems with student behavior in the classroom.

Literature also showed that even in the best managed classrooms, student misbehaviors still exist (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). This was seen with the Brophy and McCaslin (1992) study where 98 regular classroom teachers, who had at least three years of elementary school teaching experience, were interviewed. The administrators of their schools had rated many of these teachers as outstanding classroom managers. Basically, this study presented the teachers with 12 types of problem students. These problem students were given labels such as failure syndrome, perfectionist, underachiever-alienated, low achiever, hostile-aggressive, passive-aggressive, defiant, hyperactive, distractible, immature, peer rejected, and shy/withdrawn (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). The findings of the study concluded that teachers attributed the causes of problem behaviors to be within the student 73% of the time. Furthermore, teachers were least confident in changing student behaviors for the problem types of low-achieving, hostile-aggressive, and defiant students.

As the focus on teacher stress increased, the issue of support was a factor that contributed to the minimization of teacher stress (Abbey & Esposito, 1985). Feitler and Tokar (1982) found that inadequate discipline policies enforced by local school administration were a major source of stress for teachers. Burke, Greenglass, and Schwarzer (1996) listed administrative red tape and lack of support as causes of teacher stress. Principal support was a major component of social support for teachers with discipline problems in their classroom (Abbey & Esposito, 1985; Littrell & Billingsley, 1994). Abbey and Esposito (1985) did a study on leadership styles. They reported that

teachers who described their principals as supportive experienced fulfillment and reported lower levels of stress. Various other researchers have also found that teachers who characterized their principals as supportive also described their work as rewarding (Rosenholtz, 1989; Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein, 1985). Thus, determining that administrative support shaped teachers' self-perception and their work habits (Fimian, 1986a, 1986b, 1987; Halpin & Croft, 1963; Lortie, 1973).

According to Abelson (1986), teachers who taught students that were diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders struggled with high levels of stress. These teachers often left the teaching profession as a result of job dissatisfaction (Johnson et al., 2005; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). Failure to meet behavioral and academic benchmarks was also included as a major contributor to stress (Zabel, Boomer, & King, 1984). Other research revealed stress was the result of physical and verbal assaults associated with teaching students with special education needs (Johnson, Gold, & Vickers, 1982). In a study completed by Green, Beszterszey, Katzenstein, Park and Goring (2002), teachers reported increased levels of stress when children with ADHD were present in their classrooms. However, the behavior problem with these students was identified with aggressive behavior that created more stress for teachers (Green et al., 2002).

A relationship was found between rural and urban teachers and student discipline. Urban teachers experienced more discipline and classroom management problems due to larger class sizes (Bloch, 1978; Haberman 1987). Goodman (1980) suggested that urban teachers were highly stressed due to problems that students bring to the classroom, in conjunction with inadequate preparation by teachers. The features of the urban classroom included language and cultural differences that created problems for ill-prepared teachers.

When compared to urban teachers, those in rural settings, face problems of student's lack of interest, absenteeism, and more drugs and alcohol use. Furthermore, teachers in rural schools may be required to teach more subjects, experiencing less effectiveness due to the lack of preparation in methodology and pedagogy for a variety of subjects (Gordon, 2002).

Abel and Sewell (1999) surveyed more than 50 rural and 46 suburban schools districts in two southern states. They found that in both rural and suburban schools, student misbehavior and time pressures caused the highest degree of stress. Working conditions dealing with student behavior and time pressures dealing with teacher workload predicted stress and burnout for rural teachers. They also noted increased turnover, poor work performance, lack of growth, excessive absenteeism, and decreased enthusiasm and productivity which may occur as a result of teacher stress and burnout. In turn, these factors cause teachers to become disappointed with their careers and could result in a loss of passion for the profession.

The literature suggests that there are significant challenges in teaching and motivating today's adolescents that are not being adequately addressed in the current system. In particular, various studies have shown that more teachers suggest strong concerns about social and discipline issues, as well as urban and rural school matters, at the secondary school level. Furthermore, teachers consistently reported that classroom management difficulties and student discipline problems significantly contributed to their tension and stress. These student discipline problems were often intensified by teachers' reports of limited classroom management skills. Thus, evidence indicated that even in the best managed classrooms, students misbehave.

Most importantly, researchers stated that sometimes students reciprocally and negatively affected their teachers who were stressed and burned out. The proposed model by Maslach and Leiter (1999) indicated that teachers became more stressed as their students' behaviors became more disruptive. Students, though, were said to react negatively toward their teachers as their teachers became stressed and burned out. These discipline issues provide evidence that teachers need to understand the underlying principle for having a management system in place. Discipline problems occur when a student refuses to obey a rule of the classroom or school. Classroom discipline begins with the teacher and there is no question that success in the classroom centers on student discipline (Bonfadini, 1993).

No Child Left Behind

From the 1700s, when the concept of standardized testing was getting its start, to the present, there have been controversies and circumstances that shaped professional practices in the standardized testing movement. Today, there is a national concern that public school systems are failing our children academically. There is also concern that we, as a nation, are losing our competitive edge in the international market. Due to these concerns, all states and/or districts in the United States developed standards specifying the required academic content for each grade level. Because of the development of such standards, the model idea is that good standardized test scores equal good education and that standardized tests have become the predominant accountability tool used to measure student achievement of these academic standards and the effectiveness of teachers in

teaching these standards (Abrams & Madaus, 2003; Burley, 2002; Erpenbach, Forte-Fast, & Potts, 2003; Lashway, 2002; Meier, 2000; Popham, 2002, 2004; Stoskopf, 2002).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) -- the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2008). It is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research (USDOE, 2008). A focus on holding schools accountable for student achievement on standardized assessments set NCLB apart from previous versions of the law (Guilfoyle, 2006). NCLB has given the federal government a greater role than ever before in setting educational standards and mandating accountability measures (Barone, 2004; Prescott, 2001; Sizer, 2004).

The NCLB Accountability Plan includes state standardized tests that vary in content, difficulty, and retake policy. Despite this, the sanctions attached to test performance as mandated by NCLB are similar from state to state (Abrams & Madaus, 2003; Erpenbach et al., 2003). States were required to have grade-level standards in reading or language arts and math beginning in the 2005-2006 school year. They were also required to administer reading or language arts, and mathematics standardized tests to all students in grades 3-8, and once in grades 10-12. In 2006-2007, state science standards were developed and recently, in 2007-2008, they were tested (Abrams & Madaus, 2003; Erpenbach et al., 2003; Popham, 2004; USDOE, 2008).

NCLB requires states to make steady progress, also known as adequate yearly progress (AYP). This AYP is measured by state standardized achievement tests in

reading or language arts, mathematics, and science. Standardized test scores used to report AYP are usually reported in 37 categories for students (i.e. by socioeconomic status, special education status, race/ethnicity, by grade etc.)-- and if any one category doesn't meet AYP goals-- the entire school is penalized and sanctions must be faced by the school (Popham, 2002, 2004; USDOE, 2008).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush (Popham, 2004). The ultimate goal of NCLB was the improvement of education for low-income and minority students, holding teachers and schools directly responsible for the effective education of all students. An unmatched amount of federal money was set aside for the implementation of this act (USDOE, 2008).

NCLB requires that 100% of all students must reach the proficient level by 2014. That means that all students, regardless of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, or special education status, will be required to score in the proficient or advanced range on the state's standardized test in reading, math and science so that there is no achievement gap. Students must demonstrate solid academic performance in the tested subject matter to rate as proficient (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; USDOE, 2008).

Family responsibilities, the need to pursue education, low salaries, poor working conditions, and emphasis on testing and standards as a result of the NCLB take their toll on teachers (Botwinik, 2007). Teachers in primarily high poverty and low performing schools are upset to see students are achieving while the school is still considered in need of improvement (Pascopella, 2006). Common weaknesses in the institutional capacity of

rural districts limit their ability to mount and maintain a school improvement process. These include low fiscal capacity, fewer management support services, greater per pupil costs, higher numbers of teachers teaching outside their specialty area, less competitive salaries and benefits, less specialized space and equipment, less availability of planning support services, and fewer evaluation support services (Harmon, Gordanier, Henry, & George, 2007).

Findings in a recent report released by Center on Education Policy suggest that scores on state tests are rising, but teachers are stressed as they are pushed to prove their high quality status and feel they must teach to the test. In addition, about 71% of districts report that they must reduce instructional time in other subjects to spend more time on reading and math because these subjects are tested under NCLB (Pascopella, 2006).

Thornton (2004) analyzed the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding the increased federal emphasis on high-stakes testing and accountability. The study included more than 76 teachers that were randomly selected, surveyed and followed by focus group interviews. Thornton concluded that the current reform efforts of NCLB were significant causes of teacher dissatisfaction and stress due to the negative impact on individual student needs, and teacher empowerment. Student motivation suffered as it “became a battle between the teacher and students, and a main reason reported for questioning whether to remain a classroom teacher in the future” (p. 7).

Goertz and Duffy (2003) examined a study from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) and found that consequences for poor performance appeared limited to professional development, coaching, and mentoring. It was suggested

that the consequences had a negative effect on schools that failed to meet testing benchmarks. As a result, the consequences did not adequately motivate school personnel.

James (2007) explored the perceptions of Wyoming's elementary teachers concerning the influences of NCLB mandates and high-stakes testing on their curriculum and instructional practices. Wyoming's Comprehensive Assessment System (WyCAS) was the criterion-references standardized test used to measure progress toward these goals in the state of Wyoming. The results of the study were mostly negative. A major finding was that the sanctions attached to low test scores had the effect of compromising the quality of teaching and weakening learning experiences. These negative effects included increased time spent in test preparation while eliminating valuable untested curriculum. It was also reported that a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching had largely replaced differentiated instruction in the classroom. Moreover, for the teachers in this study, much of the joy and creativity of teaching and learning had been displaced by stress, worry, and disillusionment because teachers taught the test rather than the students (James, 2007).

Administrators in rural school districts face many challenges implementing NCLB. Specifically, the issue of importance to these school districts is the requirement that all teachers serving in schools receiving federal funds must meet Highly Qualified Teacher guidelines. "N.C.L.B.'s new certification requirements will likely increase disincentives to teach in rural schools" (McClure, Redfield, & Hammer, 2003, p. 4). These teachers must meet stringent certification standards and can only teach in their endorsed area. Also they must possess the ability to address the needs of a diverse student population. Needless to say, due to the difficulty of attracting and keeping licensed

teachers, many rural districts also have to face additional state and federal compliance issues.

The Highly Qualified Teacher guidelines of NCLB do not adequately accommodate the special challenges of teachers in small rural school districts. These teachers may sometimes be required to teach more than one subject due to small enrollment and limited staffing. Also these teachers must obtain full state certification or pass state-approved exams in the subject areas that they teach. All teachers must meet the highly qualified teacher requirements in NCLB. In addition, teachers must have been provided professional development, intense supervision, or mentoring to become highly qualified in the additional subject areas that they were not formally prepared to teach. This places an enormous responsibility on teachers and on the rural school districts and often times the rural teachers do not possess the resources to acquire necessary training.

Rural school districts also must struggle to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress component of NCLB. These schools must look at quality teaching and the hiring of good teachers and how it increases student achievement. Harmon and Branham's (1999) study identified the need for rural school districts to attract and retain quality teachers in order to create and implement higher standards for student achievement. This issue of quality teaching was seen when 30 members of the Education Commission of the States worked with Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer. Their aim was to define quality teaching and to correlate teacher skills and attributes to student achievement (Geringer, 2000). The results indicated that schools that were staffed by less experienced teachers struggled to raise student achievement and meet the expectations placed upon the schools. According to The Rural School and Community Trust (2001), the states that performed the highest

on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) had the highest percentages of well-qualified teachers. Conversely, the percentage of teachers with emergency certification is a strong predictor of low student performance.

Currently, in 2009 former President George W. Bush finished his presidential term without having won congressional renewal of his NCLB policy. The new president, Barack Obama, stated during his presidential campaign that he had a lot of discussions with teachers and that they feel betrayed and frustrated by NCLB. Also, because of inadequate funding, there are school districts all across the country that are having a difficult time implementing NCLB (Stephanopoulos, 2007).

The Barack Obama and Joe Biden website provides links to a variety of useful sources that discuss the president's views on the educational system in the United States ("Education", n.d.). The website states that while President Obama supports the NCLB law's overall goal, he believes the program needs fixing. He believes the goal of the law was the right one, but unfulfilled funding promises, inadequate implementation by the Education Department, and shortcomings in the design of the law itself have limited its effectiveness and undercut its support. As a result, the law has failed to provide high-quality teachers in every classroom and failed to adequately support and pay those teachers.

The Barack Obama and Joe Biden website also includes criticisms concerning the NCLB program ("Education", n.d.). President Obama criticizes the NCLB program for its emphasis on standardized tests and states that he will create a different set of individualized assessments that will show how prepared a child is for higher education and the workplace. He also believes that schools that are under-performing need to be

better supported, rather than punished, as is the current system of NCLB. President Obama and Vice President Biden say they will reform NCLB, which starts by funding the law. Obama and Biden believe teachers should not be forced to spend the academic year preparing students to fill in bubbles on standardized tests. The president's plan will improve the assessments used to track student progress to measure readiness for college and the workplace and improve student learning in a timely, individualized manner. Obama and Biden promise to improve NCLB's accountability system so that it is supporting schools that need improvement, rather than punishing them.

The literature suggests that there is a relationship that exists between teacher stress and issues exasperated by the NCLB Act. Critics argue that the pressure of testing causes teachers to dumb down the curriculum, reduce critical thinking activities, rely more heavily on drills and worksheets, and reduce the quality of education (Corbett & Wilson, 1991; Madaus, 1988; Smith, 1991; Smith & Rottenberg, 1991). High poverty and low performing schools also have the tendency to be in need of improvement. In comparison to urban schools (which are known as rich city schools), this need will be subject to increasingly severe requirements by rural teachers and the negative effects of high-stakes testing could include staff replacement. This suggests that there are ways to improve student achievement while maintaining high-quality instruction and a focus on critical thinking activities. The issue of NCLB is an ongoing issue of frustration for many educators.

Summary

Taken together, the review of literature can best be summarized by providing some evidence in the areas of teacher workload, student misbehavior and discipline problems in the classroom, and issues exasperated by NCLB. Studies and reports show a definite link between the stress levels of teachers, teacher workload, discipline problems, the NCLB Act and how they lead to job dissatisfaction and ultimately stress and burnout. As a result of this stress, teacher attrition may occur.

The literature concludes that workload is an important factor that affects teachers' stress. It encompasses the amount of time spent working, the number of classes taught, and the number of students in each class (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). It also includes the number of hours that a teacher puts into his or her job and is likely to be related to that person's sense of fatigue, boredom and stress. Data revealed that longer working hours are correlated with more stress and negative attitudes only when these hours involve continuous and direct contact with the person's clients (students; Maslach, 1976). Also, the literature shows that there are a number of assignments that are given to teachers in the classroom that are aggravating and may cause frustrations and stress. These teachers are given unreasonable teaching assignments that may bring on frustrations and stress (Brock & Grady, 2001; Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999; Johnson & Carey-Webb, 1999; Wise et al., 1987). Thus, the responsibilities that beginning teachers must engage in are not added as the beginner gradually increases his or her teaching skills and knowledge. Instead, the beginner teacher must learn while he or she is performing the teaching duties (Lortie, 1975), therefore producing feelings in some teachers that they are being treated unfairly.

Finally, assessment workload is also included in teacher workload research. It involves the additional responsibility of administering and preparing students for school-wide student assessments (Smith & Bourke, 1992). The other types of workload included administrative, teaching, and resources. The literature concluded that these types of excessive hours had a damaging effect on a teacher's home life, makes recruitment and retention of teachers increasingly difficult, and leads to stress-related illnesses. All in all, the literature presents the studies that look at these differences in workload and found that they may create an environment of inconsistency and have the potential to produce feelings in some teachers that they are being treated unfairly. Without these studies we wouldn't see the gaps that surround the attrition rate of teachers and why they leave the profession.

Based on the literature, classroom management and discipline appear to be sources of stress for teachers in terms of students' behaviors, attitudes and lack of motivation for learning (Gordon, 2002). Gold and Roth (1993) believe that stress in itself is neutral, but the teacher's perceptions are the key to negative stress response. The job and profession do not elicit stress; it is the person's reaction to the job and its requirements that create stress (Greenberg, 1984). In turn, the demands of controlling the classroom environment can create excessive drain on the emotional strength of a teacher and may lead to stress and burnout in the profession (Bonfadini, 1993).

Yoon (2002) discovered that negative teacher-student relationships were predicted by teacher stress and found that the more stress interactions with a particular student or group of students increased for a teacher, the more negative and unpredictable a teacher's response became. Thus, there is a positive correlation between these negative patterns of

communication between the teacher and the student and the increased tension and unsatisfactory relationships in the classroom.

After a decade of emphasis on standards-based reform, the NCLB act was passed which increased accountability requirements for schools. With the accountability of NCLB, there were many pressures on teachers. These pressures include the connection to Title I funds, the increased likelihood of sanctions for schools that fail to perform, and the increased pressure on the classroom teacher to get high test scores from the children. As this pressure increased, it added to the frustrations and stress levels of teachers. Also, over the next several years, the educational literature around NCLB will expand because it is a new form of burnout that has not been extensively addressed.

There seems to be an abundance of literature on teacher attrition. Specifically, work in the area appears to be in the beginning stages regarding rural school districts and how they are attempting to address the problem of teacher attrition. The continued pattern of high attrition in rural schools leads to the conclusion that the problem has not been adequately addressed and that teacher attrition in rural schools and districts is still a major problem.

Additionally, a void in literature has found that rural schools might play out differently on these challenging areas than urban schools. The accumulated research offers few suggestions for rural districts. The majority of research on teacher stress and burnout focuses on urban school teachers. Little research has examined the differences in stress and burnout between rural and urban school teachers despite the fact that rural and urban school systems are different. Researchers are better able to share statistics about the problem and speculate about why teachers leave than they are able to provide direction to

rural school districts about what they can do to prevent the problem of attrition before it occurs. Consequently, there is a need to learn more about the experiences of middle school teachers, particularly in small rural schools.

The middle school program also presents a void in literature because students are working on the transition from childhood to adolescence and during this stage of development they perceive adults differently. This is an enormous turning point in their lives and it requires them to navigate physical and emotional development issues. Middle school teachers must address the unique developmental needs of this age group and examine relationships to achieve learning.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The concepts of teacher workload, student discipline, and the NCLB Act are all associated with the stress levels among teachers. However, the goal of this research was to attain from teachers their own feelings about their job and what they found stressful and not stressful relating to contributing factors on their job.

The results to the study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between teacher workload survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
2. Is there a relationship between student discipline survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
3. Is there a relationship between No Child Left Behind Act survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
4. Do rural middle school teachers in County O find their job stressful as measured by the Survey of Teachers and the Perceived Stress Scale?
5. Are there differences in the Perceived Stress Scale scores of participants, as measured by the Survey of Teachers, based on the following demographic variables: grade level that is taught, sex, age, race, highest degree obtained, total years teaching, total years teaching at current school, area of certifications, whether or not they are teaching a

a content area that is MCT tested, and whether or not they are National Board certified?

This chapter provides specific details regarding methods and procedures used to conduct this study. The methodology of this study is divided into (a) Research Design, (b) Population, (c) Instrumentation, (d) Analysis of Data, and (e) Limitations of the study.

Research Design

Research questions 1, 2, and 3 used a correlational research design. A correlational research design involves collecting data to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). In other words, it involves the relationship of one group, but has two variables to measure. The purpose for using a correlational design was to establish relationships or use existing relationships to make predictions (strength of relationship). Correlational does not compare; but the degree to which two variables are related is expressed as a correlation coefficient. Research Question 4 used a descriptive research design. Descriptive research determines and reports the way things are and is mainly collected through a questionnaire, survey, an interview or observation (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

Also causal-comparative research design was used in this study for Research Question 5. The causal-comparative research design attempts to determine the cause, or reason, for existing differences in the behavior or status of groups of individuals (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). It is compared under different conditions with two or more variables. The dependent variable or “effect” is the variable that is being measured. The

independent variable or “cause” is a behavior or characteristic that influences some other behavior or characteristic. The “cause” is the something that makes the two groups different. With causal-comparative, you cannot control or manipulate the independent variable (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

A causal-comparative design in the present study allowed the researcher to study the relationships between teachers who are experiencing high levels of stress and those who are experiencing low levels of stress by examining different demographic variables for the comparison. Multiple independent variables included teacher workload, student discipline, and the No Child Left Behind Act. The dependent variable was the perceived stress score. Significant differences between the mean scores of independent variables for teachers helped provide the information needed to ascertain areas where school teachers in this study were most similar or different when considering their background in specific areas. The researcher’s goal was to explain variations in the dependent variables by examining consistencies in the independent variables. The data gathered in this study provided an awareness of factors that can increase understanding of teacher stress levels.

Population

The population for this study consisted of 108 teachers from city and county schools located in O county, Mississippi. These teachers were from the middle level environment that included grades 5, 6, 7, and 8.

The county schools included W. O. County High School (Year 2007-2008 had 10 teachers who taught both seventh and eighth graders [approx. 31 students in grade 7 and 19 in grade 8]; Year 2008-2009 currently has 22 seventh grade students and 26 eighth

grade students), W. O. County Elementary School (Year 2007-2008 had five teachers where one taught fifth grade, one taught sixth grade, one taught PE and two taught Special Education [approx. 23 students in grade 5 and 19 students in grade 6]; Year 2008-2009 has 27 fifth grade students and 22 sixth grade students), E. O. County High School (Year 2007-2008 had 12 teachers who taught both seventh and eighth graders [approx. 41 students in grade 7 and 31 students in grade 8]; 2008-2009 school year has 45 seventh grade students and 46 eighth grade students), and E. O. County Elementary School (Year 2007-2008 had 9 teachers where two taught fifth grade, two taught sixth grade, one taught PE and four taught Special Education [approx. 41 students in grade 5 and 40 students in grade 6]; Year 2008-2009 has 53 fifth grade students and 36 sixth grade students). The city schools which include W. S. Elementary (Year 2008-2009 has 14 fifth grade teachers [approx. 336 students in grade 5]), H. I. School (Year 2008-2009 has 25 sixth grade teachers [approx 310 students in grade 6]), and A. Middle School (Year 2008-2009 has 49 teachers; Year 2007-2008 approx 608 students where 326 were from grade 7 and 275 were from grade 8). The researcher examined grade levels 5 through 8 because those levels make up the middle school sector. County school data was given by the Assistant Superintendent and taken from OSCAR software program; City school data given by principals of each school.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used for this study. The first one was a teacher survey instrument (Appendix B) composed of specific sources of stress that was designed by the researcher. The name of the survey was the Survey of Teachers. The researcher adapted

the questions from related empirical studies and the literature, (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Farber, 1984a; Farber, 1984b; Friesen & Williams, 1985; Gordon, 2002; Greenlee & Ogletree, 1993; Litt & Turk, 1985; McCormick & Solman, 1992; Payne & Furnham, 1987; Yeh, 2006), which identified top stressors and their relationship with teachers.

The Survey of Teachers consisted of two sections. The first section of the survey gathered demographic data and the second section of the survey contained statements pertaining to specific sources of stress. These statements assessed the degree of stress (if any), as perceived by the teacher. The teachers using a 1 to 5 Likert scale rating completed the items. The teachers were instructed to complete the questionnaire as candidly as possible. A rating of 1 indicated that the item was not stressful. A rating of 5 indicated that the item represented a major source of stress.

There were three contributing stress source factors that were measured on the survey. This survey was designed to measure the top three sources of stress that had been identified in the literature. The factors were: Teacher workload, Student discipline, and No Child Left Behind. The responses were added for each statement, the higher the score, the higher the level of stress for the stress source factors.

One field test was conducted with the survey in a small rural town in Northern Mississippi using teachers from the middle level environment. The purpose of the pilot study was twofold. It assisted the researcher in refining and clarifying the items in the instrument and enabled the researcher to conduct an initial analysis of the data, and to determine if the choice of items was appropriate for the study.

A professor in the Department of Psychology at a university located in northern Alabama reviewed the survey for content validity purposes and said “On the face of it, it

looks like it measures stressors that may be common to teachers.” Also, experimental researchers in the field of Counselor Education at Mississippi State University evaluated the instrument and indicated that the survey measured the three stress factors (teacher workload, student discipline, and No Child Left Behind) that will effectively allow the participants to think about specific situations that they are encountering on the job.

The survey instrument’s reliability was tested by methods including internal consistency, such as calculating the Cronbach alpha and also through the use of a confirmatory factor analysis in SPSS statistical software. The reliability of a scale was determined by the number of items that defined the scale and the reliabilities of those items (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). The reliability increased as the number of items increased.

The second instrument that was used was The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Appendix C), which is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. The PSS is the only empirically established index of general stress appraisal (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). For the purposes of this study, it was used to examine and provide additional information about the relationship between the three stress factors (teacher workload, student discipline, and No Child Left Behind) and stress. The PSS measures the degree to which situations in one’s life are appraised as stressful (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). It measures a persons’ evaluation of the stressfulness of the situations in the past month of their lives.

The PSS was designed for use with community samples with at least a junior high school education (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). The items were easy to understand and

the response alternatives were simple to grasp. Moreover, the questions were quite general in nature and relatively free of content specific to any sub-population group.

The PSS was composed of questions that asked about the feelings and thoughts during the last month. Respondents were asked how often they had felt a certain way. PSS scores were obtained by reversing responses (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2) to the seven positively stated items (items 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 13) and then summing across all scale items (Cohen et al., 1983).

Numerous research studies have used the PSS scale. One in particular, was examined by Cohen (1986), which presented evidence from three samples, two of college students and one of participants in a community smoking-cessation program. This study found that the PSS provided better predictions than did life-event scales of psychological symptoms, physical symptoms, and utilization of health services. The results indicated that people with higher PSS scores were less likely to quit smoking and had a greater increase in post-treatment smoking rates than did those with relatively lower scores.

Other studies also found that higher PSS scores are associated with greater vulnerability to stressful life-event-elicited depressive symptoms. A study conducted by Kuiper, Olinger, and Lyons (1986) investigated global perceived stress levels and how these stress levels moderate the degree of relationship between negative life events and depression. The participants in this study used the PSS along with two other surveys-- The Beck Depression Inventory and the Life Experiences Survey. The findings resulted in an increase in depression levels as negative life changes scores increased and also that the global level of stress significantly moderated the relationship between depression and negative life events (Kuiper et al., 1986).

The PSS has also been used with life events, coping processes, and personality factors as an outcome variable, predicting changes in perceived stress. This was seen in a study by Linville (1987). This study tested self-complexity and how it moderates the adverse impact of stress on depression and illness. Participants in this study completed measures of stressful events, self-complexity, depression, and illness in two sessions separated by two weeks. Results indicated that participants that were higher in self-complexity were less prone to depression, perceived stress, physical symptoms, and occurrence of the flu and other illnesses following high levels of stressful events (Linville, 1987).

The internal reliability of the PSS was established with the Coefficient alpha of .78 (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). Test-retest reliability was not useful because the items on the scale were anchored to appraisals in the past month, so one would not necessarily expect high test-retest reliability for measurements that did not overlap in time. The issue of construct validity dealt with a broad view of the study to see what the scale was really measuring. Research studies involving a construct are valid only when the instrument used actually measured the intended construct and not some unanticipated variable (Gay et al., 2006). The PSS scores were moderately related to responses on other measures of appraised stress, as well as to measures of potential sources of stress as assessed by event frequency (Cohen & Williamson, 1988).

Data Collection

Approval from the Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was requested by the researcher to conduct the present study. The researcher was granted

permission to conduct the present research study by the IRB Committee. The population for this study consisted of teachers from city schools and county schools located in O county, MS. These teachers were from the middle level environment that included grades 5, 6, 7, and 8. The researcher met with superintendents of the school districts in county O to request permission to conduct the study. Once the superintendents granted permission to conduct the study, the researcher set up appointments with the principals to discuss plans for administering the survey instruments to the teachers during faculty or team meetings. During the faculty or team meetings participants were given Teacher Consent forms (Appendix A) and also the researcher informed the participants that their participation was of the voluntary nature and that they were free to refuse participation. Identifying information was not written on the survey instruments and the participants were informed of the anonymity of their participation.

To reduce variations in procedures, the researcher conducted and retrieved all data collection during the faculty or team meetings. The researcher read all instructions to the participants. The average length of completion was approximately 5 to 10 minutes. No incentives were provided. After the teachers completed the survey, their responses were kept confidential. No names were collected on the interview or observation data. Participant names were not connected in any way to their responses in the present study. The data was collected after teachers completed the instruments during the faculty or team meetings. All data was stored in a secure environment. After gathering the data from the instruments, the researcher scored the Survey of Teachers and the PSS and entered data into SPSS statistical software. The data was destroyed after being analyzed.

Analysis of Data

To analyze the data, composite means scores were computed from each sub item response of teachers in three stress source areas of the survey instrument. Each of the three subscales had one mean item score. Adding all of the three subscale scores and dividing that number by three derived the total score on the Survey of Teachers.

Afterwards, a comparison of computed *Z* scores and critical *Z* scores was utilized to find significant differences at the .01 significance level. Also, an overall *F* test was computed by running an analysis of variance (ANOVA) that showed if there were statistically significant differences in the three stress source areas and the demographic variables. The ANOVA determined the proportion of variability that was attributed to each of the stress factors. Post-hoc tests were necessary in the event of a significant ANOVA.

The PSS (Cohen et al., 1983) was used to measure stress and was compared with the stressors that the teachers rated on the survey instrument that could potentially lead to stress. The PSS scores were obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items, e.g., 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, etc. and then summing across all 10 items. Scores ranged from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater stress. The researcher used the most common technique that determined the product moment correlation coefficient, referred to as the Pearson *r*. The Pearson *r* is appropriate when both variables to be correlated are expressed as continuous (i.e., ratio or interval) data (Gay et al., 2006). The Pearson *r* determined the strength of the linear relationship between the sources of stress (teacher workload, student discipline, and NCLB) and the PSS. The statistical procedures were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of three contributing factors (i.e., teacher workload, student discipline, and the No Child Left Behind Act) on the stress levels of rural middle school teachers. Descriptive statistics were obtained for all variables, as a first view of the data obtained. In order to more accurately explain and predict teacher perceptions of the three contributing factors, the following research questions were answered:

1. Is there a relationship between teacher workload survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
2. Is there a relationship between student discipline survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
3. Is there a relationship between No Child Left Behind Act survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
4. Do rural middle school teachers in County O find their job stressful as measured by the Survey of Teachers and the Perceived Stress Scale?
5. Are there differences in the perceived stress scale scores of participants, as measured by the Survey of Teachers, based on the following demographic

variables: grade level that is taught, sex, age, race, highest degree obtained, total years teaching, total years teaching at current school, area of certifications, whether or not they are teaching a content area that is MCT tested, and whether or not they are National Board certified?

This chapter is a presentation of the results. The chapter is divided into two sections: the results of the descriptive data from the Survey of Teachers and the results of each of the five research questions.

Descriptive Data

The demographic data from the Survey of Teachers indicated that 108 teachers participated in the present research. Twenty-seven participants were from the county schools and 81 were from the city schools in county O. All were selected to comprise the final sample, 21 of which were males (19.4%) and 87 of which were females (80.6%). Based on ethnic background demographics, 68 (63.0%) of the participants were Caucasian, 39 (36.1%) were African American, and 1 (9%) participant was Asian-Pacific Islander. Table 1 presents the results of gender and ethnicity data pertaining to the Survey of Teachers.

Table 1 Gender and Ethnic Background

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Female	87	80.6
Male	21	19.4
Total	108	100.0

Ethnic Background	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Caucasian/White	68	63.0
African American/Black	39	36.1
Asian-Pacific Islander	1	0.9
Total	108	100

Table 2 presents the distribution of the grade levels that the participants taught. Twenty-nine (26.9%) participants taught fifth grade; 22 (20.4%) taught sixth grade; 14 (13.0%) taught seventh grade; 13 (12.0%) taught eighth grade; 4 (3.7%) taught both fifth and sixth grades; and 26 (24.1%) taught both seventh and eighth grades.

Table 2 Grade Level Taught

Grade Level	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
5th grade	29	26.9
6th grade	22	20.4
7th grade	14	13.0
8th grade	13	12.0
5th and 6th grades (teach both)	4	3.7
7th and 8th grades (teach both)	26	24.1
Total	108	100

Table 3 presents the distribution of the age of the participants. Of the 108 respondents who participated in the study, all responded to the questionnaire items on age. The results indicated that the median age of teachers employed in the participating schools was between 31-40 years old (34.3%).

Table 3 Age Range (In Years)

Age Range (in years)	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
18-21 years old	1	0.9
22-25 years old	14	13.0
26-30 years old	12	11.1
31-40 years old	37	34.3
41-50 years old	18	16.7
51-60 years old	24	22.2
61 years old or over	2	1.9
Total	108	100

Table 4 indicates that the highest degree earned by the majority of teachers, n = 58, was a 4 year College Degree (53.7%), followed by 41 teachers with a Masters Degree (38%), 8 teachers (7.4%) with a Specialist Degree, and 1 (.9%) with a Doctoral Degree.

Table 4 Highest Degree Earned

Degree	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
4 year	58	53.7
Masters	41	38.0
Specialist	8	7.4
Doctoral	1	0.9
Total	108	100

Tables 5 and 6 revealed the frequency (n) and percent information pertaining to teaching experience. Thirty-four (31.5%) teachers reported total years teaching experience being between 1 and 5 years, followed by 31 teachers (28.7%) between 11 and 19 years and 25 teachers (23.1%) with 20 or more total years teaching experience. In addition, 56 teachers (51.9%) had been teaching at their current school between 1 to 5 years.

Table 5 Total Years Teaching

Years	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
1 to 5 years	34	31.5
6 to 10 years	18	16.7
11 to 19 years	31	28.7
20+ years	25	23.1
Total	108	100

Table 6 Current Years Teaching at Current School

Years	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
1 to 5 years	56	51.9
6 to 10 years	31	28.7
11 to 19 years	14	13.0
20+ years	7	6.5
Total	108	100

Tables 7, 8 and 9 describe the responses of participants in terms of whether or not they are teaching in the area in which they are certified, teaching in a content area that is MCT tested, and whether or not they are National Board Certified. One hundred six (98.1%) teachers are teaching in the area for which they were certified; with 56 (51.9%) teachers not teaching a content area that is Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) tested. Eighty-three (76.9%) teachers are not National Board Certified.

Table 7 Are you Teaching in Area that you are Certified?

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Yes	106	98.1
No	2	1.9
Total	108	100

Table 8 Are you Teaching a Content Area that is MCT Tested?

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Yes	52	48.1
No	56	51.9
Total	108	100

Table 9 Are you National Board Certified?

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Yes	25	23.1
No	83	76.9
Total	108	100

Table 10 indicates that when asked about licensure, 80 teachers (74.1%) stated they had a Teacher Education Route License, followed by 10 teachers (9.3%) who reported having an Alternate Route License. Six teachers (5.6%) had both Teacher Education Route and Administrator Licenses. Three teachers (2.8%) had both a Teacher Education Route License and Special Five Year Educator License. Two teachers (1.9%) had a Special Five Year Educator License and also two teachers (1.9%) had both a Special Five Year Educator License and Vocational Educator License. The remainder of teachers had a Vocational Educator License (.9%), Reciprocity (.9%), both Alternate Route License and Licenses By District Request Only (.9%), both Teacher Education Route License and Reciprocity (.9%), and both Teacher Education Route License and By District Request Only (.9%).

Table 10 Types of License

License	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Teacher Ed Route	80	74.1
Alternate Route	10	9.3
Special Five year	2	1.9
Vocational	1	0.9
Reciprocity	1	0.9
Teacher Ed Route and Special Five year	3	2.8
Alternate Route and By District Request	1	0.9
Teacher Ed Route and Reciprocity	1	0.9
Special Five year and Vocational	2	1.9
Teacher Ed Route and Administrator	6	5.6
Teacher Ed Route and By District Request	1	0.9
Total	108	100

Findings Reported by Research Questions

Research Question 1

Is there a relationship between teacher workload survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?

Table 11 revealed the Pearson correlation coefficient that was calculated for the relationship between participants' teacher workload and perceived stress (PSS). The correlation of teacher workload and PSS was (.328). A moderate positive correlation was found ($r(106) = .328, p < .001$), indicating a statistically significant linear relationship between the two variables. Teachers who have a greater workload, tend to have a moderate degree of perceived stress. The probability of achieving statistical significance is based not only on statistical considerations but also on the actual magnitude of the effect size (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). Basically, the larger the effect size, the higher the power of the statistical test. Using Cohen's effect size for

correlations, the coefficient of determination (r^2) had a small effect size of .1076.

Cohen's analysis is suggesting that 1% of the variance of teacher workload is explained by the relationship between teacher workload and PSS.

Table 11 Correlations Between Contributing Factors and Perceived Stress

Contributing Factors		Teacher	Discipline	NCLB	PSS
		Workload			
Teacher					
Workload	Pearson Correlation	1.000			
Discipline	Pearson Correlation	0.321**	1.000		
NCLB	Pearson Correlation	0.333**	-0.031	1.000	0.025
PSS	Pearson Correlation	0.328**	0.293**	0.025	1.000

Note. **.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between student discipline survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?

Table 11 also revealed the Pearson correlation coefficient that was calculated for the relationship between student discipline and how it predicted perceived stress (PSS). The correlation of student discipline and PSS was (.293). A weak positive correlation was found ($r(106) = .293, p < .001$), indicating a statistically significant linear relationship between the two variables. In other words, student discipline problems had a weak influence on the perceived stress of teachers in County O. Using Cohen's effect size for correlations, the coefficient of determination (r^2) had a very small effect size of .0858. The analysis is suggesting that .08% of the variance of student discipline is explained by the relationship between student discipline and PSS.

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between No Child Left Behind Act survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?

Table 11 revealed the Pearson correlation coefficient that was calculated for the relationship between NCLB and how it predicted perceived stress (PSS). The correlation of NCLB and PSS was (.025). An almost abysmal positive correlation was found ($r(106) = .025, p > .01$), indicating that there is not a statistically significant linear relationship between the two variables. NCLB is not related to perceived stress in teachers in County O. Using Cohen's effect size for correlations, the coefficient of determination (r^2) had an abysmal effect size of .0006. Cohen's analysis is suggesting that 0% of the variance of teacher workload is explained by the relationship between NCLB and PSS.

Research Question 4

Do rural middle school teachers in County O find their job stressful as measured by the Survey of Teachers and the Perceived Stress Scale?

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) measures subjective evaluations of the stressfulness of a situation. Scores ranged from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater stress. The mean score of the PSS was 17.89 ($SD = 7.35$), indicating that there is not a high level of perceived stress amongst teachers in County O.

Research Question 5

Are there differences in the Perceived Stress Scale scores of participants, as measured by the Survey of Teachers, based on the following demographic variables: grade level that is taught, sex, age, race, highest degree obtained, total years teaching,

total years teaching at current school, area of certifications, whether or not they are teaching a content area that is MCT tested, and whether or not they are National Board certified.

The means of the grade levels taught by teachers in County O were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(5,102) = 1.44, p = .217$). The teachers who taught the 5th grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade, both 5th and 6th grades, and both 7th and 8th grades did not differ significantly in their perceived stress scores. Teachers who taught 5th grade had a mean score (M) of 19.45 ($SD = 7.70, n = 29$). Teachers who taught 6th grade had $M = 16.27, SD = 6.49, n = 22$. Teachers who taught 7th grade had $M = 20.57, SD = 6.58, n = 14$. Teachers who taught 8th grade had $M = 18.85, SD = 9.12, n = 13$. Teachers who taught both 5th and 6th grades had $M = 13.75, SD = 5.50, n = 4$ and teachers who taught both 7th and 8th grades had $M = 16.23, SD = 6.936, n = 26$.

A one-way ANOVA was computed comparing the gender scores of the participants who took the teacher survey and the perceived stress scale. A significant difference was found among the genders ($F(1,106) = 6.23, p = .014$). Based on the estimated marginal means, the females ($M = 18.74, SD = 7.49, n = 87$) perceived stress scores were higher than the males ($M = 14.38, SD = 5.64, n = 21$).

The age range (in years) of the participants was compared and no significant difference was found ($F(6,101) = 1.52, p = .180$). Based on the estimated marginal means, teachers that were 61 years old or over ($M = 15.00, SD = 5.66, n = 2$) had lower perceived stress than the teacher who was 18-21 years old ($M = 32.00, n = 1$) and also the teachers who were 22-25 years old ($M = 20.79, SD = 6.59, n = 14$), 26-30 years old ($M = 17.00, SD = 8.80, n = 12$), 31-40 years old ($M = 18.54, SD = 7.09, n = 37$), 41-50 years

old ($M = 17.33$, $SD = 7.60$, $n = 18$, and 51-60 years old ($M = 15.71$, $SD = 6.80$, $n = 24$). Post hoc tests were not performed because at least one group had fewer than two cases.

The ethnic background of participants was compared using a one-way ANOVA. A significant difference was found among the ethnic backgrounds ($F(2,105) = 5.31$, $p = .006$). There was only 1 teacher who was Asian-Pacific Islander ($M = 28.00$, $n = 1$). All other teachers were either Caucasian or African American. Based on the marginal means, the Caucasian teachers ($M = 19.31$, $SD = 7.49$, $n = 68$) had higher perceived stress than the African American teachers ($M = 15.15$, $SD = 6.264$, $n = 39$). Post hoc tests were not performed because at least one group had fewer than two cases.

The means of the highest degree earned by the participants was compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(3,104) = 2.00$, $p = .118$). Teachers with a 4 year degree ($M = 19.14$, $SD = 6.74$, $n = 58$) had higher marginal means than teachers with a Masters degree ($M = 16.46$, $SD = 7.900$, $n = 41$), Specialist degree ($M = 17.62$, $SD = 7.37$, $n = 8$), and the teacher with a Doctoral degree ($M = 6.00$, $n = 1$). Post hoc tests were not performed because at least one group had fewer than two cases.

The means of the participants' total number of years teaching was compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(3, 104) = 1.23$, $p = .305$). Tukey's HSD was also used to determine the nature of the differences between the numbers of total years teaching and no mean differences were significant. Teachers who had taught 1 to 5 years ($M = 19.56$, $SD = 7.12$, $n = 34$) had a higher mean than teachers who had taught 6 to 10 years ($M = 18.67$, $SD = 8.32$, $n = 18$), teachers who had taught 11 to 19 years ($M = 16.45$, $SD = 7.05$, $n = 31$), and teachers who had taught for 20 plus years ($M = 16.84$, $SD = 7.21$, $n = 25$).

The means of the participants' total number of years teaching at their current school was compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(3,104) = .025, p = .995$). Tukey's HSD was also used to determine the nature of the differences between the numbers of total years teaching at their current school and no mean differences were significant. Teachers who had taught 6 to 10 years ($M = 18.00, SD = 8.59, n = 31$) in their current schools had higher means than teachers who had taught 20 plus years ($M = 17.29, SD = 6.10, n = 7$), 11 to 19 years ($M = 17.64, SD = 5.64, n = 14$), and 1 to 5 years ($M = 17.96, SD = 7.29, n = 56$) in their current schools.

The means of whether or not participants were teaching in the area that they were certified were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(1, 106) = .490, p = .486$). The teachers who were teaching in their areas of certification ($M = 17.82, SD = 7.400, n = 106$) had lower means than teachers who were not teaching in their areas of certification ($M = 21.50, SD = 2.121, n = 2$). Post hoc tests were not performed because there were fewer than three groups.

The means of whether or not participants were teaching a content area that is MCT tested were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(1, 106) = 1.38, p = .243$). The teachers who were teaching a content area that is MCT tested ($M = 18.75, SD = 7.75, n = 52$) had higher means than teachers who were not teaching a content area that is MCT tested ($M = 17.09, SD = 6.93, n = 56$).

The means of teachers who were and were not National Board Certified were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(1,106) = 2.22, p = .139$). The teachers who were National Board Certified ($M = 19.80, SD = 7.72, n = 25$) had higher means than the teachers who were not National Board Certified ($M =$

17.31, $SD = 7.18$, $n = 83$). Post hoc tests were not performed because there are fewer than three groups.

The means of participants' types of licenses were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(10, 97) = .725$, $p = .700$). Teachers with a Teacher Education Route license had $M = 18.30$, $SD = 7.413$, $n = 80$. Teachers with an Alternate Route License had $M = 17.40$, $SD = 6.67$, $n = 10$. Teachers with a Special Five Year Educator License had $M = 15.50$, $SD = 2.121$, $n = 2$. The Teacher with a Vocational Educator License had $M = 32.00$, $n = 1$. The teacher with a Reciprocity License had $M = 11.00$, $n = 1$. Teachers with both the Teacher Education Route License and the Special Five Year Educator License had $M = 17.67$, $SD = 8.083$, $n = 3$. The teacher with both an Alternate Route License and Licenses by District Request Only had $M = 15.00$, $n = 1$. The teacher with both the Teacher Education Route License and Reciprocity had $M = 9.00$, $n = 1$. The teachers with both a Special Five Year Educator License and Vocational Educator License had $M = 16.50$, $SD = .707$, $n = 2$. The teachers with both a Teacher Education Route License and Administrator License had $M = 16.00$, $SD = 10.020$, $n = 6$. The teacher with both Teacher Education Route License and Licenses by District Request Only had $M = 14.00$, $n = 1$. Table 12 revealed the descriptive information for all of the demographic variables.

Table 12 Mean Scores of PSS by Demographic Variables

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<u>GRADE LEVEL</u>			
5th Grade	29	19.45	7.70
6th Grade	22	16.27	6.49
7th Grade	14	20.57	6.58
8th Grade	13	18.85	9.12
5th and 6th Grades (teach both)	4	13.75	5.50
7th and 8th Grades (teach both)	26	16.23	6.94
<u>GENDER</u>			
Female	87	18.74	7.49
Male	21	14.38	5.64
<u>AGE RANGE</u>			
18-21 years old	1	32.00	
22-25 years old	14	20.79	6.59
26-30 years old	12	17.00	8.80
31-40 years old	37	18.54	7.09
41-50 years old	18	17.33	7.60
51-60 years old	24	15.71	6.80
61 years old or over	2	15.00	5.66
<u>ETHNIC BACKGROUND</u>			
Caucasian/White	68	19.31	7.49
African American/Black	39	15.15	6.26
Asian-Pacific Islander	1	28.00	
<u>HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED</u>			
4-year College Degree (BA, BS)	58	19.14	6.74
Masters Degree	41	16.46	7.90
Specialist Degree	8	17.62	7.37
Doctoral Degree	1	6.00	
<u>TOTAL YRS TEACHING</u>			
1-5years	34	19.56	7.12
6-10years	18	18.67	8.32
11-19years	31	16.45	7.05
20years+	25	16.84	7.21

Table 12 cont.

<u>TOTAL YRS AT CURRENT SCHOOL</u>			
1-5years	56	17.96	7.29
6-10years	31	18.00	8.60
11-19years	14	17.64	5.64
20years+	7	17.29	6.10
<u>TEACHING IN CERTIFIED AREA?</u>			
Yes	106	17.82	7.40
No	2	21.50	2.12
<u>TEACHING MCT TESTED AREA?</u>			
Yes	52	18.75	7.75
No	56	17.09	6.93
<u>NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION</u>			
Yes	25	19.80	7.72
No	83	17.31	7.18
<u>LICENSURE</u>			
Teacher Education Route License	80	18.30	7.41
Alternate Route License	10	17.40	6.67
Special Five Year Educator License	2	15.50	2.12
Vocational Educator License	1	32.00	
Reciprocity License	1	11.00	
Teacher Ed Route and Special Five Year Licenses	3	17.67	8.08
Alternate Route and By District Request Only Licenses	1	15.00	
Teacher Ed Route and Reciprocity Licenses	1	9.00	
Special Five Year and Vocational Licenses	2	16.50	0.71
Teacher Ed Route and Administrator Licenses	6	16.00	10.02
Teacher Ed Route and By District Request Only Licenses	1	14.00	

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine rural middle school teacher's perceptions of stressful factors present in their current position. The three contributing factors (teacher workload, high student discipline and interaction problems, and the No Child Left Behind Act) are some of the top stressors of teachers (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Farber, 1984a; Farber, 1984b; Friesen & Williams, 1985; Gordon, 2002; Greenlee & Ogletree, 1993; Litt & Turk, 1985; McCormick & Solman, 1992; Payne & Furnham, 1987; Yeh, 2006). This study explored teacher stress through perceptions of how teachers viewed themselves and their workload, student discipline and behavior problems in the classroom, and issues as they implement the No Child Left Behind Act and the significant effects that these challenges have on their work and/or their working situation.

Stress, as defined by Lazarus (1966), occurs when individuals perceive that they cannot cope with the demands from their internal or external environment. Specifically, these demands may upset their sense of balance and affect their psychological and physiological state, requiring action to restore the balance (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). The stressful nature of teaching has been implicated as a factor, which can cause teachers to either (a) burnout and leave the profession or (b) continue to teach, but at a limited level of involvement (Tompkins, 1995).

The participants for the study included 108 teachers from city schools and county schools located in O county, MS. These teachers were from the middle level environment that included grades 5, 6, 7 and 8. Of the 108 teachers, 27 were from the county schools and 81 were from the city schools in county O. All were selected to comprise the final sample, 21 of which were males and 87 of which were females. Based on ethnic background demographics, 68 of the participants were Caucasian, 39 were African American, and one participant was Asian-Pacific Islander. Twenty-nine participants taught 5th grade; 22 taught 6th grade; 14 taught 7th grade; 13 taught 8th grade; 4 taught both 5th and 6th grades; and 26 taught both 7th and 8th grades. The teachers for this study varied in age, total years teaching, total years teaching at current school, certifications, whether or not they are teaching a content area that is MCT tested, and their type of licensure. Additionally, the highest degree earned by the majority of teachers, n = 58, was a 4 year College Degree, followed by 41 teachers with a Masters Degree, eight teachers with a Specialist Degree, and one with a Doctoral Degree. Only 25 of the teachers are National Board Certified and 83 teachers are not National Board Certified.

Two instruments were used for this study. The first one was a teacher survey instrument composed of specific sources of stress that was designed by the researcher. The researcher adapted the questions from related empirical studies and the literature, (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Farber, 1984a; Friesen & Williams, 1985; Gordon, 2002; Greenlee & Ogletree, 1993; Litt & Turk, 1985; McCormick & Solman, 1992; Payne & Furnham, 1987; Yeh, 2006), which identified top stressors and their relationship with teachers.

The second instrument that was used was The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of

stress. The PSS is the only empirically established index of general stress appraisal (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). For the purposes of this study, it was used to examine and provide additional information about the relationship between the three stress factors (teacher workload, student discipline, and No Child Left Behind) and stress. The PSS measures the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful (Cohen et al., 1983). It measures a persons' evaluation of the stressfulness of the situations in the past month of their lives.

A variety of statistical analyses were utilized to address the research questions. These analyses included descriptive statistics, computing mean scores, comparing computed *Z* scores and critical *Z* to find significant differences, and computing overall *F* tests to show if there were statistically significant differences in the three stress source areas between the background variables. Also the PSS (Cohen et al., 1983) was used to measure stress and was compared with the stressors that the teachers rated on the survey instrument that could potentially lead to stress, and factor analysis procedures were done to correlate the survey instrument with the PSS. The statistical procedures were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Summary

The concepts of teacher workload, student discipline, and the No Child Left Behind Act are all associated with the stress levels among teachers. The goal of this research was to more accurately predict which of these constructs (if any), had the predictive value for determining the stress levels of middle school teachers. The results to the study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between teacher workload survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
2. Is there a relationship between student discipline survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
3. Is there a relationship between No Child Left Behind Act survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?
4. Do rural middle school teachers in County O find their job stressful as measured by the teacher survey and the Perceived Stress Scale?
5. Are there differences in the Perceived Stress Scale scores of participants, as measured by the teacher survey, based on the following demographic variables: grade level that is taught, sex, age, race, highest degree obtained, total years teaching, total years teaching at current school, area of certifications, whether or not they are teaching a content area that is MCT tested, and whether or not they are National Board certified?

The outcomes of these research questions are discussed further in this chapter accordingly.

Research Question 1

Is there a relationship between teacher workload survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?

Yes, there is a relationship between teacher workload survey scores and perceived stress scale scores. A moderate positive correlation was found ($r(106) = .328, p < .001$), indicating a statistically significant linear relationship between the two variables. In other

words, teachers who have a greater workload, tend to have a moderate degree of perceived stress.

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between student discipline survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?

Yes, there is a relationship between student discipline survey scores and perceived stress scale scores. A weak positive correlation was found ($r(106) = .293, p < .001$), indicating a statistically significant linear relationship between the two variables. In other words, student discipline problems had a weak influence on the perceived stress of teachers in County O.

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between No Child Left Behind Act survey scores and Perceived Stress Scale scores?

An almost abysmal positive correlation was found ($r(106) = .025, p > .01$), indicating that there is not a statistically significant linear relationship between the two variables. NCLB is not related to perceived stress in teachers in County O.

Research Question 4

Do rural middle school teachers in County O find their job stressful as measured by the Survey of Teachers and the Perceived Stress Scale?

Scores ranged from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater stress. The mean score of the PSS was 17.89 ($SD = 7.35$), indicating that there is not a high level of perceived stress amongst teachers in County O.

Research Question 5

Are there differences in the Perceived Stress Scale scores of participants, as measured by the Survey of Teachers, based on the following demographic variables: grade level that is taught, sex, age, race, highest degree obtained, total years teaching, total years teaching at current school, area of certifications, whether or not they are teaching a content area that is MCT tested, and whether or not they are National Board Certified.

The pretest means of the grade levels taught by teachers in County O. were compared using a one-way ANOVA and no significant difference was found ($F(5,102) = 1.44, p = .217$). The teachers who taught the 5th grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade, both 5th and 6th grades, and both 7th and 8th grades did not differ significantly in their perceived stress scores.

A one-way ANOVA was computed comparing the gender scores of the participants who took the teacher survey and the perceived stress scale. A significant difference was found among the genders ($F(1,106) = 6.23, p = .014$). Based on the estimated marginal means, the females perceived stress scores were higher than the males

The age range (in years) of the participants was compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(6,101) = 1.52, p = .180$). Based on the estimated marginal means, teachers that were 61 years old or over had lower perceived

stress than the teacher who was 18-21 years old and also the teachers who were 22-25 years old, 26-30 years old, 31-40 years old, 41-50 years old, and 51-60 years old.

The ethnic background of participants was compared using a one-way ANOVA. A significant difference was found among the ethnic backgrounds ($F(2,105) = 5.31, p = .006$). Based on the marginal means, the Caucasian teachers had higher perceived stress than the African American teachers

The means of the highest degree earned by the participants was compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(3,104) = 2.00, p = .118$). Teachers with a 4 year degree had higher marginal means than teachers with a Masters degree, Specialist degree, and the teacher with a Doctoral degree.

The means of the participants' total number of years teaching was compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(3, 104) = 1.23, p = .305$). Tukey's HSD was also used to determine the nature of the differences between the numbers of total years teaching and no mean differences were significant. Teachers who had taught 1 to 5 years had a higher mean than teachers who had taught 6 to 10 years, teachers who had taught 11 to 19 years, and teachers who had taught for 20 plus years.

The means of the participants' total number of years teaching at their current school was compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(3,104) = .025, p = .995$). Tukey's HSD was also used to determine the nature of the differences between the numbers of total years teaching at their current school and no mean differences were significant. Teachers who had taught 6 to 10 years in their current schools had higher means than teachers who had taught 20 plus years, 11 to 19 years, and 1 to 5 years in their current schools.

The means of whether or not participants were teaching in the area in which they were certified were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(1, 106) = .490, p = .486$). The teachers who were teaching in their areas of certification had lower means than teachers who were not teaching in their areas of certification.

The means of whether or not participants were teaching a content area that is MCT tested were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(1, 106) = 1.38, p = .243$). The teachers who were teaching a content area that is MCT tested had higher means than teachers who were not teaching a content area that is MCT tested.

The means of teachers who were and were not National Board Certified were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(1,106) = 2.22, p = .139$). The teachers who were National Board Certified had higher means than the teachers who were not National Board Certified.

The means of participants' types of licenses were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ($F(10, 97) = .725, p = .700$).

Conclusions

The following findings have emerged from this study. First, middle school teachers in O County perceive their heavy workloads in their current positions as being stressful. Too much paperwork, not adequate time to prepare lessons, pressure to keep up with the latest technology, having too many multitasks and not being able to meet administrative deadlines without problem were the major concerns that were presented in

the Survey of Teachers. This finding corresponds with the results found by Litt and Turk (1985), who administered a questionnaire to 291 American high school teachers and found that too much paperwork was one of the three specific job tensions. This finding did not correspond to those findings in the Moses and Delaney (1970) study that determined the pressures placed on teachers. Their findings showed that if teachers feel numerous pressures and stress, they almost certainly pass those feelings of tension and anxieties on to their students (Fantini & Wernstein, 1968; Lemaster, 1981). We cannot determine if the anxieties of teacher workload and how they are passed onto the student from the information gathered in this study. We would have to further research students and their views in order to get an accurate account. The findings of this study also has to take into account that O County is located in a small rural town. Nevertheless, the literature confirms that rural school districts tend to experience teacher shortage problems and attrition. They have difficulty getting top candidates and have high rates of attrition. Rural districts face significant problems replacing effective teachers that leave with qualified instructors. Frantz (1994) determined that rural school districts experience higher rates of attrition than suburban districts due to a variety of factors, including working conditions such as teaching out of assignment (which is included in teacher workload), and limited professional development. Consequently, the findings of this study have not looked at the attrition numbers for the county and the city schools in O County to determine this data.

The second finding that emerged in this study was that middle school teachers in O County perceive student misbehavior and discipline problems in their current classrooms as being stressful. The Survey of Teachers asked student discipline questions

that pertained to the following: disruptive students taking time away from teaching, frustrations that teachers have when they teach students who are not motivated to learn, no administrative support, and not being able to meet administrative deadlines without problem. The issue of perceived stress due to student discipline problems corresponds to the study done by Friedman (1995) that found that teacher tolerance of student misbehaviors depended on the particular classroom management style utilized by the teacher. He said that the teacher perceived the student's misbehavior as stressful if a match was not made between a teacher's particular classroom management style and a specific type of student misbehavior. This stress is evidenced because of the variety of teachers that participated in the study. These teachers taught different subjects and had different experiences in the classroom at different schools, so not only was it found that teachers were exposed to similar types of student misbehaviors (within the schools) and that they perceived these student misbehaviors differently but depending on the teacher's classroom management style regulated how they perceived frustrations within their particular classrooms.

The third finding that emerged from this study was that middle school teachers in O County do not perceive that issues exasperated by the No Child Left Behind Act are stressful. The Survey of Teachers focused on the following issues with NCLB: whether or not the teacher is satisfied with the NCLB law which requires high-stakes standardized testing, whether or not the teacher is upset to see that students are achieving while the school is "in need of improvement", whether there are appropriate levels of funding to pay for the testing and the remedial services needed to ensure students make the grade, whether the teacher feels trapped into having to teach students only those skills that will

be tested, and whether the teacher is bothered that skills such as creative thinking and problem-solving ability are being dismissed as unimportant. This finding corresponds to a 2004 study by Thornton that analyzed the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding the increased federal emphasis on high-stakes testing and accountability. The study included more than 76 teachers that were randomly selected, surveyed, and followed by focus group interviews. Thornton concluded that the current reform efforts of NCLB were significant causes of teacher dissatisfaction and stress due to the negative impact on individual student needs and teacher empowerment. Also the finding of this study incorporates the fact that the schools are located in a small rural community. So, from this perspective, it corresponds to Harmon and Branham's (1999) study that identified the need for rural school districts to attract and retain quality teachers in order to create and implement higher standards for student achievement. Their study looked at the issue of quality teaching and how it was seen when 30 members of the Education Commission of the States worked with Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer. Their aim was to define quality teaching and to correlate teacher skills and attributes to student achievement. The findings of this study did not directly look at the achievement scores of the individual students, but the fact that both the county and the city schools scored basic and minimal on the statewide assessment which was not enough to move the districts to the next levels of accreditation. Therefore, new teaching strategies must be implemented to accomplish change. As accountability increases through the further implementation of NCLB, so will the chances that teacher stress will become an even more pronounced issue.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is just a start in examining teacher stress levels of rural middle school teachers. A major area for future exploration should be in examining the coping mechanisms used by these teachers in their battle against stress. Previous research suggests that by providing appropriate professional development and offering teachers' coping strategies, can be seen as possible solutions to the problem of teacher stress (Merrow, 1999).

Stress is a persistent factor that affects teacher performance. To understand its prevalence and its sources in rural and urban schools would provide a basis for assisting teachers to cope with stress and for helping school districts to provide programs and activities that include stress management for individuals and for groups. Therefore it might be beneficial to compare the stress levels of rural middle school teachers in comparison with urban middle school teachers.

One consequence of teacher stress is burnout. Teachers are leaving the profession at alarming rates. To increase job satisfaction and teacher retention, it is essential to take steps to reduce the increased pressure created by this high stakes atmosphere. Ongoing professional development activities that focus on relieving stress and integrating relief plans into the school improvement plan may help administrators, teachers, and members of school staff manage stress more effectively.

The present study examined demographic variables to see how they differed in perceiving stress. It may be beneficial to examine why specific variables perceive stress in a particular way. For example, the two demographic variables that were statistically significant in the study were gender and ethnic background. Future research could reveal

why males perceive stress differently than females and also why Caucasians perceive stress differently than African Americans. Furthermore, the contributing stress factors (teacher workload, student discipline, and NCLB) may be examined in the same way. Looking at these reasons may help prohibit teacher turnover in school districts.

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APPENDIX A
TEACHER CONSENT

Consent Form To Participate in Teacher Stress Research

I, Karen V. Davidson, am a doctoral candidate that is currently researching teacher stress for my dissertation study. My research study is entitled “Teacher Stress in Rural Middle Schools: Teacher Perceptions of Three Contributing Factors.”

The purpose of the study is to investigate sources of stress that middle school teachers may experience on the job to determine if these sources have an affect on the stress levels of middle school teachers. Specifically, I will work with the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teachers from the county and city schools in Oktibbeha County. The teacher’s participating in this study may gain insight into their own professional careers through the process of reflecting on experiences that will suggest and influence decisions by teachers on issues such as decision-making, classroom management, teacher preparedness, and principal support. It may also increase an awareness concerning the degree of perceived burnout within the school.

I will administer a survey and a scale instrument during faculty meetings and/or team meetings at the schools. The first survey instrument (Appendix A) will identify three stress factors (teacher workload, student discipline and No Child Left Behind) and their relationship with teachers. The second scale instrument (Appendix B) will measure the degree to which the three factors (teacher workload, student discipline and No Child Left Behind) are appraised as stressful.

You, a perspective participant in my study, will be given the survey and scale instrument during your faculty meeting or team meeting at your school. It will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey and scale instrument. Your responses will be kept confidential. No names will be collected on the interview or observation data. Your name will not be connected in any way to your responses in my research project. I will collect the data after teachers complete the instruments during the meetings. All data will be stored in a secure environment. The data will be destroyed after it has been analyzed and submitted to instructor to fulfill dissertation requirements.

If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to give me a call via telephone or email. My information is as follows: Karen Davidson---
kdavidson@colled.msstate.edu, 662-324-8483.

Also, if you would like a copy of the final report, this can be provided upon request. For additional information regarding human participation in research, please feel free to contact the MSU Regulatory Compliance Office at 662-325-0994.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary, your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, you may refuse to answer any specific question.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Karen Davidson

APPENDIX B
TEACHER SURVEY INSTRUMENT

SURVEY OF TEACHERS

As part of my doctoral dissertation research, I am conducting a study to survey the stress levels of teachers. Kindly complete this questionnaire as candidly as possible.

Thanks,

Karen Voncille Davidson

Please check the appropriate blank.

1. What grade level do you teach?

5th grade 6th grade 7th grade 8th grade

2. Are you Male or Female?

Male Female

3. What is your age?

18-21 22-25 26-30 31-40 41-50

51-60 61 or over

4. What is your race?

Caucasian/White African-American/Black

Hispanic Asian-Pacific Islander

Native American Other (Please specify) _____

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

4-year College Degree (BA, BS) Master's Degree

Specialist Degree Doctoral Degree

Professional Degree (MD, JD)

6. How many total years teaching?

_____ 1-5years _____ 6-10years _____ 11-19years
_____ 20years+

7. How many total years teaching at current school?

_____ 1-5years _____ 6-10years _____ 11-19years
_____ 20years+

8. Are you teaching in the area for which you were certified?

_____ Yes _____ No

9. Are you teaching a content area that is MCT tested?

_____ Yes _____ No

10. Are you National Board Certified?

_____ Yes _____ No

11. What Licensure do you have? Check all that apply.

_____ Teacher Education Route License (*Five Year Educator License*)

_____ Alternate Route License (*MS Alternate Path to Quality Educators; Teach MS Institute; Masters of Arts in Teaching; American Board Certification*)

_____ Special Five Year Educator License (*Audiologist; Child Development; Dyslexia Therapy; Emotional Disability; Guidance and Counseling; Library Media; Performing Arts; Psychometrist; School Psychologist; Special Education Birth-Kindergarten; Speech/Language Clinician*)

_____ Vocational Educator License (*Vocational Non-Degree/Three Year License; Vocational Non-Education Degree (Associate Degree)/ Three Year License; Vocational Non-Education Degree (Bachelor Degree)/ Three Year License; Vocational Educator License Non-Degree; Non-Education Degree/ Five Year License*)

_____ Licenses by District Request Only (*JROTC; Special Administrator Fellowship; Three-Year Interim Certificate; One-Year License for Veteran Teachers*)

_____ Administrator License (*Non-practicing; Entry Level; Career Level; Alternate Route; Athletic Administrator*)

_____ Reciprocity (*Two Year License; Five Year License*)

Please indicate how you feel about your job by circling the appropriate number.

1 Strongly agree, 2 Agree, 3 Neither agree nor disagree,

4 Disagree, 5 Strongly disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | There is too much paperwork to do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | Disruptive students take away time I have available for teaching. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | I am satisfied with the structure of The No Child Left Behind law, which requires high-stakes, standardized testing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | I have adequate time to prepare for my lessons. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | I have no discipline problems in my classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | I am upset to see students are achieving while the school is still considered “in need of improvement”. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | I feel pressured to keep up with the latest technology. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | I am frustrated when I teach students who are not motivated to learn. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9.	There are appropriate levels of funding to pay for the testing and the remedial services needed to ensure students make the grade.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I have to multitask and do more than one thing at a time.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I have administrative support with discipline problems.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I feel trapped into having to teach my students only those skills that will be tested, rather than being allowed to assess each child's needs and then teach what is needed for each child to be successful.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I am able to meet administrative deadlines without problem.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I have difficulty effectively managing my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I am bothered that skills such as creative thinking and problem-solving ability are being dismissed as unimportant.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C

THE PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE (PSS)

Perceived Stress Scale- 10 Item

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, please indicate with a check how often you felt or thought a certain way.

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?

___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?
___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?
___0=never ___1=almost never ___2=sometimes ___3=fairly often ___4=very often

This scale can be found in:

Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 24, 385-396. [Link to full-text \(pdf\)](#)

Cohen, S., & Williamson, G. (1988). Perceived stress in a probability sample of the United States. In S. Spacapan & S. Oskamp (Eds.), The social psychology of health: Claremont Symposium on applied social psychology. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. [Link to full-text \(pdf\)](#)

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