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Teacher Retention and Turnover in Small, Remote, Rural Schools in Missouri

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Teacher Retention and Turnover in Small, Remote, Rural Schools in Missouri

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-method study sought to find specific factors influencing teachers in small, remote, rural school districts to continue teaching or to leave their teaching position. Additionally, this study sought to identify specific things district-level administrators could do influence teacher retention rates in small, remote, rural school districts. The quantitative data revealed the top three most influential attributes contributing to teacher retention are supportive school administration, the size of the teacher's class, and the teacher's relationship with colleagues. The qualitative data provided narratives to support these rankings and to further identify factors of small, remote, rural schools and their influence on teacher retention. The qualitative data revealed specific things district-level administrators can do to contribute to teacher retention such as make each teacher feel supported, build relationships with teachers and provide teachers with praise and recognition. The following is a detailed analysis of the way these data can be used to improve small, remote, rural school districts.

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I would like to acknowledge the work of Dr. Henry Tran and Dr. Douglas Smith in the realm of rural education, specifically teacher recruitment and retention efforts. They are paving the way with profound findings specifically related to rural schools and their work influenced my study greatly. I would also like to thank the eight schools in the Golden Valley Vernon County Conference for their contribution to this study.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my husband, Chance Dickey, and my children, Easton and Archer Dickey. They have been faithful to allow me to work on my doctorate while continuing to love and support me along the way, in spite of the great time commitment.

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GLOSSARY

Teacher attrition – teachers leaving the school system they are working in either to work in another school system or to leave the profession entirely

Teacher retention – teachers remaining in the school system they are working in for another school year

Teacher turnover – the act of teachers leaving and being replaced by individuals new to the role

Small, remote, rural schools – The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) describes any area outside of an urbanized area, one with a population of fewer than 50,000, as a rural area. The NCES also defines a remote, rural school as one that is “census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster”. In this study, these broad definitions of rurality are combined with a community supported definition of a small, rural school as being defined as one that has fewer than 200 students.

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Teacher attrition and turnover is a pervasive concern in schools worldwide. This concern is especially problematic in small rural schools. Identifying how school administrators working in small, rural schools not only recruit the best teachers but also ensure instructional systems are structured in a way that prevents significant teacher turnover rates and retain educators is critical. As researchers examine the complexities of rural education, the topic of teacher turnover, attrition, and retention is magnified as schools worldwide face reduced budgets during an ongoing international pandemic. District and school-level administrators in small, rural settings struggle, many times in isolation, to provide quality guidance and feedback to their teachers and often feel overwhelmed with the varied responsibilities and tasks they are forced to manage in comparison to non-rural school administrators. In small, rural settings, administrators wear many hats while in urban areas, leaders have more assistance on their administrative teams. The line between district-level and building-level leadership is often blurred in rural school systems, and there is a need to identify factors, outside of monetary incentives, that attract and keep teachers in rural schools.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors within small, remote, rural school districts in Southwest Missouri that contribute to teacher retention. This study also investigated the factors in these school systems that lead to teacher attrition and turnover. There is an absence of existing research that focuses specifically on small, rural schools and the information gleaned from this research will help guide decision-makers in these school systems by providing useful data that is relevant in rural school settings.

Problem Statement

Rural schools with a high teacher attrition rate face many instructional and systemic challenges which result from the proverbial “revolving door” of teachers. Instruction is hindered by the lack of consistency among personnel, and the continuing need to hire new teachers is costly. There are positive factors and benefits of working in rural schools and research into successful recruitment and retention methods can assist administrators in uncovering the strategies necessary to retain educators and reduce turnover rates.

Specific subjects are hard to staff, including math, science, family and consumer science, as well as band. When these teaching positions are open in small, rural schools, the challenge to fill them increases as school districts are unable to offer competitive teacher salaries and often these positions involve many classes to prepare for.

Focuses on Instruction and/or Systemic Issues

As the Superintendent at a small, rural school in Southwest Missouri, I work daily to foster an environment where staff members want to be a part of, and each year as teachers are hired, I hope we have chosen educators who will finish their career in the position for which they were hired. Each Spring, as planning for subsequent years begins, I am surprised by the vacated position that inevitably have to be filled.

Upon my initial hire at Bronaugh R-VII in the spring of 2015, the Board of Education laid out a goal for me to bring unity back to the staff and to create a cohesive team. The district includes grades PreK-12 and I was initially hired to be the sole principal in the district. A new superintendent was hired at the same time and we were directed to work closely together to bring consistency to the rural school. During the summer of 2015, as we prepared for the 2015-2016 school year, the district was facing a 50% turnover rate. Administrators, teachers, and support

staff were making a mass exodus from the district. It is challenging for new administrators to make quality hiring decisions without having a strong understanding of the pulse of the building and the personalities of the team remaining in the district.

The district has seen a gradual rise and fall in turnover rates from year to year. However, there are still teachers leaving each year in pursuit of other opportunities and we do not know what specifically is keeping our teachers here who remain year after year. I was named Superintendent beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, and the changing of position has opened my eyes to a new layer of consequences the district faces as we deal with the consequences of turnover each year.

This so-called “revolving door” of educators has hindered instruction and student learning due to a lack of curriculum consistency and the constant need for teachers who remain in the district to catch new faculty up on vertical curriculum alignment. With the ever-changing Missouri Grade Level Expectations, teachers work hard throughout the year to ensure they are aligned vertically and horizontally. We update curriculum and do research to bring the best practices into the instruction. As teachers come and go frequently, a lot of this work is lost in the transition and new hires are faced with the task of redoing curriculum. At our school, each teacher is a department of one, so there is not an entire grade level or content team to rely on for information.

It is costly for our district, and others like ours, to continue to hire and train new teachers. Our district strongly emphasizes the importance of professional development for new teachers and as we continue to hire new teachers year after year, this cost adds up. Even if the district is able to hire a veteran teacher, a faculty member new to our district requires extra training to become acquainted with our programs and expectations.

As we progress through the COVID-19 pandemic, our district feels the effects of the labor shortage across the country. We are struggling to fill open teaching positions with certified teachers and are forced to hire long-term substitutes to serve as teachers of record. Schools, and others like ours who have to hire long-term substitutes to fill vacancies are then faced with an even more dramatized shortage of substitute teachers.

Is Directly Observable

I was hired in the spring of 2015 and before my official contract began, I was given the responsibility of overseeing the hiring of new faculty members. Including support staff and administrators, we hired fourteen new employees out of thirty in the district. This includes teachers, paraprofessionals, and permanent substitutes. We hired twelve new faculty members for the 2015-2016 school year who were certified including the superintendent and principal. This mass exodus produced a 48% attrition rate of certified staff. In the summer of 2016, we had two certified faculty members leave to pursue work outside the world of education and two more certified teachers were hired to fill their roles. The attrition rate for the 2016-2017 school year was 8% which was a 40% decrease from the previous summer.

In the summer of 2017 two certified faculty members retired, and four left the district to continue their work in education elsewhere. The district hired seven certified teachers because prior to the 2017-18 school year, the half day preschool and full day kindergarten were combined and taught by the same teacher who retired at the end of that year. However, the teacher remained in the district as the half time preschool teacher. The 2018-19 school year was another year of a small attrition rate, as only three certified teachers left the district.

The summer of 2019 brought a 20% teacher attrition rate as the district lost the superintendent and four certified faculty members. Three of these employees retired and the

other two took positions elsewhere. The district had a sixth faculty member retire, however the individual will remain on staff as our part time athletic director. During the 2019-20 school year, the district had five new certified employees and four certified employees who have been in the district but are serving in new roles.

Is Actionable

In my role as Superintendent, I have the capacity to make district level decisions with the goal of decreasing staff turnover. Being in a district level leadership position allows me to have a birds-eye view of the school system. While building level and district level leaders work side by side, and district level leaders have a direct involvement in the day to day happenings in the school building, the Superintendent in a small, rural school has the unique opportunity to visualize and capture the effect of decisions and changes and their effect on the district as a whole. The knowledge gleaned from this study can also benefit other small, rural schools having an impact beyond a single school district.

Connects to a Broader Strategy of Improvement and the School's or System's Action Plan

My mission as a superintendent in a small, rural school is to continue to educate others about the value of rural schools, and to show the community, legislature, local and state leaders, and other educators, that rural education matters and our small schools must stay open and operating. My vision for the district is to create an educational atmosphere where students and staff want to be, and this vision is currently driving my decisions as the superintendent. It is my opinion that my vision is common amongst our Board of Education, the majority of faculty members, and the community. The district has recently undergone a troubled year with a superintendent leaving mid-year amidst a financial crisis. The district worked hard to rebuild fund balances and maintain the financial health of the district. I watched first-hand as the

community came together and supported the Board of Education and faculty as we faced these sudden challenges head-on. The town depends on the school for survival. Evidence of the community's support is shown in the results of the April 2018 election as the people passed a \$0.675 levy increase with an almost 73% vote in the affirmative.

Aside from financial stability, our district's success lies with the faculty. Administration, teachers, and support staff who remain a part of the system as a result of a desire to be a part of the organization will be a sign of success. The district sets a goal every year as part of the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) to recruit and retain quality employees. Not only do we focus on high-quality teachers, we are concerned with the support staff's performance as well and recognize their contribution to the district's success.

Is High-Leverage

Our district has seen significant turnover in math, science, and upper elementary. These grade levels and subjects also tend to be areas we score the lowest on state assessments. Lowering our level of attrition and retaining teachers in our math, science, and upper elementary teachers will provide consistency for students and provide an opportunity for student growth.

Research Questions

The research focused on three main questions:

Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

Question 2: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?

Question 3: What specifically can district-level leaders in small, remote, rural schools do to improve the retention of teachers?

Overview of Research Methodology

Teacher turnover and attrition rates cause many issues for schools, especially those in rural settings where it is already hard to find highly qualified staff to fill roles. This research study provides insight into what rural schools can do to attract and retain great teachers. Survey and interview data from teachers and administrators in small, rural schools reveals features of rural schools which cause teachers to want to stay and identify areas of concern that contribute to attrition. Data was collected from various rural schools of similar size who are members of the Golden Valley Vernon County Conference.

Positionality

I began working at Bronaugh R-VII in the fall of 2015 and served as principal through the end of the 2018-2019 school year. In October 2018, the superintendent left and the position was filled with a part-time interim for the remainder of the school year. That school year provided opportunities for me to assist our interim superintendent and learn, first-hand, many of the duties and responsibilities of a district superintendent. The following 2019-2020 school year, I was hired as the superintendent and am still in that role today.

As the superintendent of a small, rural school district in southwest Missouri, I understand the unique positions schools are placed in when monetary compensation offered to teachers is not competitive to other area schools. I am also familiar with the benefits of working in a small school and desire to pinpoint the strategies districts can use to effectively recruit and retain quality educators.

It is important to note that in many small, rural schools, there is a blurred line between building and district level leaders, and even though I am now the superintendent, my office is twenty feet from our principal's office and we work side by side daily to ensure our school is

running effectively. In small, rural schools, superintendents have the unique opportunity to have a bird's eye view of district workings, while also taking a direct role in the day-to-day activities in the district.

Researcher's Role

I used my role as superintendent of a small, rural school and the connections I am able to foster between other school districts to conduct research related to recruitment, and retention of quality educators. Data was collected from fellow superintendents who are also stakeholders invested in providing a quality education to students in rural schools. The key to success in rural schools is quality educators who maintain their positions and bring quality instruction to the table, year after year.

Ravitch and Carl's (2016) criticality in qualitative research describe the role I took to find the connections between the theories related to teacher retention and turnover and my practice in reality. Critically allows me to actively engage with my research, and make formal connections between what I am seeing in my school system. Throughout my study I needed to practice reflexivity to uncover my own subjective views and their effect on the study. It is important to constantly reflect on my own assumptions and ideas that could potentially shape the way I view the results of my study.

Assumptions

During March of 2020, Bronaugh R-VII was shut down, like many other schools across the country, as the COVID-19 pandemic ripped across the world. School closures have affected the funding of the Missouri School Foundation Formula; however, financial support was received from the state and local level. The pandemic is impacting the third school year, and educators are presuming funding will remain steady throughout the state of Missouri and

reductions in force due to a loss of adequate funding will not have to take place. I do not anticipate any financial reasons Bronaugh R-VII would need to intentionally downsize.

This study also operates on the assumption that small, rural school districts can implement changes that will decrease teacher turnover and cause teachers to want to stay in their current teaching positions. It is assumed there are factors outside of monetary compensation that cause teachers to retain their positions, and the results of this study will uncover these features.

Definition of Key Terms

Teacher attrition – teachers leaving the school system they are working in either to work in another school system or to leave the profession entirely

Teacher retention – teachers remaining in the school system they are working in for another school year

Teacher turnover – the act of teachers leaving and being replaced by individuals new to the role

Small, remote, rural schools – The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) describes any area outside of an urbanized area, one with a population of fewer than 50,000, as a rural area. The NCES also defines a remote, rural school as one that is “census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster”. In this study, these broad definitions of rurality are combined with a community supported definition of a small, rural school as being defined as one that has fewer than 200 students.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one discusses the problem of teacher attrition and turnover in small, rural schools, and examines the purpose of the study, which is to identify ways to promote teacher retention in small, rural schools and reduce attrition and turnover rates. Chapter two of this

dissertation contains the review of relevant research literature. Chapter three contains the research methodology and research questions associated with the study.

CHAPTER TWO – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Teacher attrition reduces student achievement, disrupts school stability, unsettles faculty relationships, and results in a loss of institutional knowledge (Wang, 2019). For a district to be successful, it is important to retain high quality educators. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher retention in small, remote rural school environments, and examine the major factors contributing to teacher attrition and turnover. Teacher attrition is defined as educators who leave their position and also the profession entirely. Teachers who leave their positions in an effort to seek employment at another district or who take a different position outside the field of education, thereby leaving a vacant position behind are described in this study as “leaving their teaching position”. Teachers who continue in their teaching positions for another school year are considered “retained”.

Rural schools can be defined a variety of ways, depending which government agency you ask for the working definition. There tends to be agreement on the number being 600 students or less for average daily attendance. To many rural schools in Missouri, 600 students seems large. According to district enrollment data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), there are 558 districts in the state of Missouri, and 290 of those have fewer than 600 enrolled students. The median number of pupils enrolled during the 2021 school year is approximately 580. There are a total of 212 school districts in Missouri who have 350 or fewer enrolled students. Analyzing the large number of rural districts in Missouri, and the large proportion of those who are small, rural schools is important since 51.9% of Missouri schools are rural.

For the purpose of this study, schools defined as small, rural schools have fewer than 200 students enrolled in grade PreK through twelve and operate as K-12 school systems, having one teacher per grade level and one teacher per content area at the junior high and high school level. Focusing on these smaller schools with fewer teachers employed allows me to study schools with similar characteristics and challenges. These districts most often operate with only one principal, so the leadership dynamics are similar across districts as well as student and teacher demographics.

Throughout my career in education, I have had the opportunity to observe and be a part of conversations related to teacher retention. Understanding teacher retention is a valuable statistic used by schools nationwide as a common benchmark to teacher quality and morale. How do school leaders not only recruit the best teachers, but also keep them from leaving the field of education entirely? I have heard some teachers report they quit a school and not the career. What can schools do to attract and retain teachers? As we enter the world of rural education, the topic takes a dramatic and interesting twist, as finances are often even more relevant due to limited funds. As an administrator in a small, rural setting, I often struggle to provide quality guidance and feedback for their teachers and often feel overwhelmed with the many hats I wear. What factors outside of monetary incentives initially influence teachers to accept teaching positions in rural schools, and more importantly, what keeps them there for the long-term?

Rural schools with high teacher turnover rates face significant and unique instructional and systemic challenges which result from the revolving door of teachers. Instruction is hindered by the lack of consistency among personnel, and the continuing need to hire new personnel is costly. To gather relevant research related to this problem of practice, I searched for

previous research centered around turnover, attrition, and retention. I then examined these articles and attempted to identify studies that focused on these factors in rural schools. There is not a large amount of studies that focus on small, rural schools so this study should contribute to the gap in understanding regarding the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural schools.

Teacher Retention: The Current National Landscape

Imazeki (2004) conducted a study to examine the relationship between salary and teacher attrition. The study examines the hazards that contribute to teacher attrition to males and females separately, as research has shown that females are more than likely than males to leave their teaching positions for personal or family reasons. An interesting finding with this study is that while higher salaries are found to decrease teacher *transfer* attrition, increasing relative salaries is correlated with higher *exit* attrition. The reason behind this second phenomenon, is when a teacher decides to leave their current position, if they are unable to find a teaching job in the area that pays as well, they will leave the profession all together (Imazeki, 2004).

The Imazeki (2004) study is also especially interesting as many other studies simply review “stayers and exiters.” Other studies often do not look at the difference in exiting the profession and *transferring* to another district. Imazeki’s research shares suggestions that raising beginning teacher pay can begin to combat transfer attrition, but likely will not phase exit attrition. The author did not have a definite reason for these correlations, but suggests a potential reason being if a teacher has made up their mind they no longer want to be a teacher, higher teacher pay in a neighboring district will not change that decision. Teachers who want to leave the profession are going to exit, and if a teacher truly wants to stay in the profession, then relative salaries come into play and a neighboring school district with a higher salary might entice a teacher to transfer to another district. The author takes into consideration that funding for

salary increases is not readily available everywhere and suggests a school might have to increase salary as much as fifteen to twenty percent to help retain teachers. School systems must determine if salary increases are cost-effective and perhaps pursue less expensive methods of retaining teachers (Imazeki, 2004).

The reasons vary as to why teachers choose to enter and, unfortunately, leave the profession. A recent study by Podolsky, Darling-Hammond, and Bishop (2019), used data from the United States Department of Education to analyze reasons K-12 teachers left the profession during the 2012 and 2013 school year. During this academic session, 37% of those who left the profession left for retirement, 10% left involuntarily, and 53% left voluntarily for reasons other than retirement. Survey data were analyzed to determine reasons those counted in the 53% chose to leave the teaching profession. Thirty-seven percent of those faculty members left for family reasons, such as pregnancy and childcare. Twenty-one percent of those surveyed left due to dissatisfaction with administration and leadership in their building and 13% left to pursue a higher salary. Of those who left, 67% reported a higher salary would be a large contributing factor should they ever choose to return to the teaching profession (Podolsky, Darling-Hammond, & Bishop, 2019.)

Teacher Retention: Addressing Teacher Shortages in Missouri

Missouri has seen a steady decline in the number of individuals pursuing teaching degrees. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Office of Educator Quality, in a report titled *Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in Missouri Public Schools, 2021*, In the 2010-2011 academic year, Missouri had 14,139 students enrolled in Educator Preparation Courses. In the 2019-2020 year, this number had dropped to 10,034.

Completers in these programs have also decreased. In 2010-2011 4,795 students completed Educator Preparation Courses and in 2019-2020, 3,651 students completed these programs.

Missouri is also facing a large percentage of teacher attrition. In the 2020-2021 school year, the percentage of teachers remaining in the classroom after three years was 55.6 percent. In the same academic year, the percentage of teachers remaining in the classroom after five years was 46.5 percent. It is concerning to see data showing that over half of new teachers do not make it to five years in the profession. In Missouri, the overall attrition rate was 10.6 percent in the 2020-2021 school year. During the 2019-2020 school year, of the 7,560 teachers hired, 57.9 percent were first year teachers. 36.7 percent were hired from other school districts in Missouri, and 5.5 percent were from out-of-state (DESE, 2021).

There is existing research to conclude teachers sometimes leave rural school settings due to distance from families, distance from shopping opportunities, and community isolation (Murphy & Angelski, 1997). Teachers come to small, remote, rural schools and are not prepared for the situations they find themselves in. Often, these factors outside of administrator control can lead to feelings of loneliness and the desire to transition to a larger school district, or a district closer to their origin. Barley (2009) concluded one method to combat this unique situation that contributes to teacher shortages is for teacher preparation programs to provide instruction on rural education systems and the qualities they might encounter there. Barley found that while some institutions taught classes that included instruction on preparing for multiple courses to prepare for, small community relations, and teaching multiple grade levels in one classroom, they were not always required by the institutions so not everyone was given the opportunity to explore what teaching in a small, rural school might be like.

It can be a challenge to teach in a remote, rural school setting and it can be even more of a challenge to live in a remote, rural setting. The socialization of teachers into rural life can be hindered by a lack of preparedness for the circumstances they will face. There is a recent study by Jessica Gallo (2020) that investigates the narratives of rural teachers' professional lives. Participants in the study provided a rich narrative of their experience in small, rural schools and described how communities are surviving due only to the existence of the school. Communities support their small, rural schools and are supportive of their efforts to remain open. The study also highlighted the struggles of small, rural schools that many who are new to the area might not be prepared for. Factors such as low funding, poverty, and lack of resources play a huge role in hindering success in small, rural schools. Teachers who support their small, rural districts, often highlight the positive, acknowledge the challenges, then provide how they mitigate those challenges. These tactics assist in keeping their schools alive by downplaying "negative stereotypes about rural people and places." Gallo summarizes there is a need to characterize these rural places and their complex features as to highlight the positives but also prepare new educators for the challenges they will face (Gallo, 2020).

Teacher Salary and Attrition: Emerging Significant Factors in Small, Rural Schools

Taking from Imazeki's (2004) research, and applying similar theories to small, rural schools, then it can be assumed if quality teachers who desire to stay in the profession, we must look at relative teachers' salaries in the area and attempt to compete in order to retain our staff. It will be interesting to see if the same theories actually apply to smaller schools, as some small schools are able to retain their staff for many years, despite not offering a salary that can compete with neighboring districts. There is a need for research to attempt to capture what reason is keeping teachers in small, rural schools. It would be interesting to attempt to capture what dollar

amount increase is enough to entice a teacher to transfer from a position they really like in a small, rural school, to a higher paying job in a different district.

Relating Imazeki's research to the study at hand, it is to be determined how salary related to retention in the small, rural school. Additional state funding for increased salaries across Missouri is not available and districts are left on their own to determine what room, if any, lies with the budget to raise teacher salaries. There is no research to determine if relatively higher salaries in the area lead teachers to leave small, rural schools in search of more money, less preps, and a larger school district. When those higher paying options are available, there is a lack of research to determine why teachers forfeit that higher salary to stay at the small, rural school. There are instances where veteran teachers spend entire careers in small, rural school districts and are considered highly qualified and effective teachers. Determining what is keeping them there through this research serves the purpose of filling that gap in the lack of understanding of the factors keeping teachers at small, rural schools when they have higher paying options available.

The study by Podolsky et al. acknowledged the need for individual school districts to analyze policies that relate to their situations when considering methods for recruitment and retention of quality teachers. The study does not pay any particular emphasis on rural settings and instead focuses on national data overall. Rural schools in geographically isolated areas who have openings in positions experiencing teacher shortages, such as math and science, should take the time to analyze their own data when choosing strategies to implement to improve attrition rates in their districts (Podolsky et al., 2019.)

A more recent study by Tran and Smith (2020) described an employee experience approach to improve retention in hard-to-staff schools. Their plan involves Herzberg et al. (1957)

motivation-hygiene theory and postulates while hygiene factors, like salary, ability to provide for family, working conditions, and interpersonal relations, contribute to job satisfaction, internal motivators such as feeling “a calling”, having a purpose, and growth opportunity, serve as the actual root of retention. Tran and Smith suggest using hygiene factors to recruit staff members, but understand these factors will not solely address retention issues. The authors suggest school systems must increase teacher satisfaction by using intrinsic factors to sustain rural teacher employment.

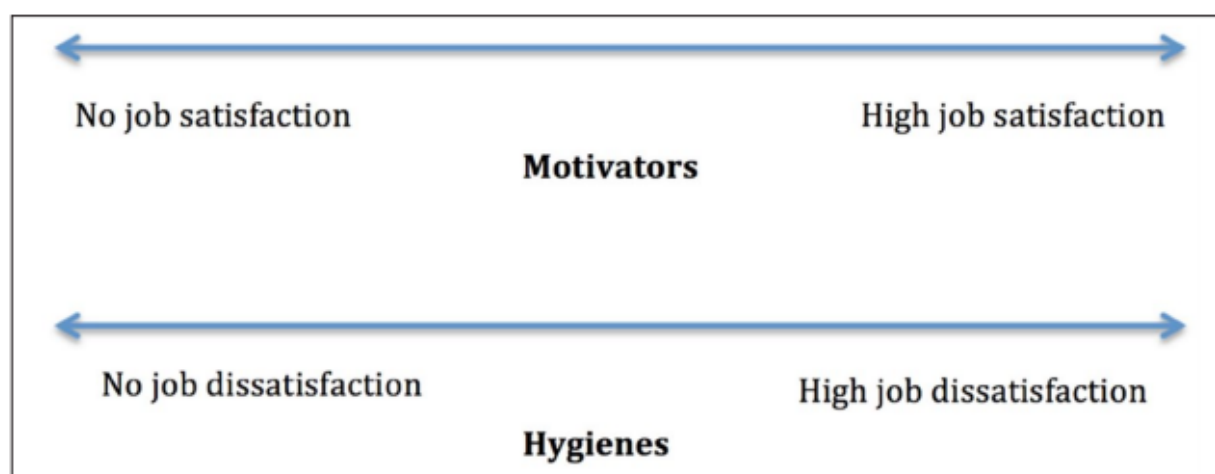


Figure 1. Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory’s view of job satisfaction.



Figure 2: Traditional view of job satisfaction.

Tran and Smith (2020), similar to many of the other studies discussed in this review of the research literature, do not take time to develop a deep analysis of their findings in relation to the small, rural school. With rural schools including even districts with up to 600 students, there is a need to conduct a deeper study of the smallest schools, those with fewer than 200 students

enrolled. In this study, survey questions will attempt to determine if hygiene factors, like salary, working conditions, interpersonal relations, and job satisfaction are related to the recruitment of teachers into small, rural schools. It will also be interesting to see if any of these hygiene factors also play a role in retention. We know teacher salaries are not competitive to area schools for the sample at hand, but what other hygiene factors would contribute to the retention of the teachers in these small, rural schools? The study will also be designed to determine if there are, alternatively, motivation features that lead them to stay in their positions in small, rural schools.

The Relationship Between School Leadership and Teacher Attrition

A study by Nichols (2018) showed a strong correlation between the perceived leadership styles of school principals and teacher satisfaction. The study suggests that teachers who perceive their principals as “transformational leaders” are more satisfied with their positions and less likely to leave their districts. The “key take-away”, according to the author, is that a principals’ leadership style is a strong predictor of Teachers’ job satisfaction (Nichols, 2018). Principals in small, rural schools are in unique situations where they are the only building-level leader. They do not have assistants and they alone bear the load of teacher development, teacher evaluation, and discipline, among so many other responsibilities they have each day. There are no studies that take a look at the relationship between building-level leadership and teacher retention in small, rural schools. Another level to the leadership-teacher retention dynamic, is the role of the district-level administrator: the superintendent. The line is often very grey when looking at leadership roles in small, rural schools, as superintendents and principals work together as a team to run their respective school districts. In many small, rural schools, the superintendent is also part of the teacher evaluation process and are active participants in the daily tasks in the district as many of these small, rural schools operate in a single building.

Player, Youngs, Perrone, and Grogan (2017) conducted a study to examine “how principal leadership and person-job fit are associated with teacher mobility and attrition” (p. 330). The authors theorized that the greater a school principal’s effectiveness, the lower the likelihood a teacher will transfer or exit the teaching profession. This same effective leadership should keep teachers in their current positions. The researchers measured leadership effectiveness based on teacher perceptions relating to the level of support and encouragement they receive from administration, staff recognition, disciplinary support, and communication of vision for the school. The authors also hypothesized the better the fit a person is for their position, the less likely they are to leave the profession. Their final hypothesis was that the relationship between leadership and attrition was more prominent for elementary teachers rather than secondary (Player et al., 2017). This researcher wishes to acknowledge the importance of “fit” while also being clear that in a small, rural school, the applicant pool is often so small that fit can often be a luxury instead of a deciding factor.

Player et al. examined not only “leavers” and “stayers”, but also “movers,” to acknowledge those teachers who left their current positions for other teacher assignments in other districts. An interesting finding in this study is the authors’ first hypothesis, namely is there is a strong relationship between teacher perceptions of principal leadership and teachers remaining in their current teaching positions? However, this same element of principal leadership had no effect on the likelihood of a teacher to leave the profession entirely. The study found no relationship between a principal’s effectiveness and retention of elementary versus secondary teachers (Player et al., 2017). Is the same scenario true in small, rural schools? Does principal leadership have any effect on a teacher’s decision to leave the profession entirely? There is no research that investigates this quandary, and it leads to thoughtful conversations

related to the decision of a teacher to leave their career in pursuit of another opportunity outside of the world of education.

Rural Schools and Teacher Attrition: Limited Research But Important Findings

The research literature relating to teacher attrition, retention, and rural schools is limited. Looking at other countries to see how they address teacher retention, a student out of east Africa conducted research to determine to what extent, if any, do monetary incentives attract and retain teachers in rural schools. The study, conducted by Mwenda and Mgonezulu (2018), examined rural districts in Salima and analyzed quantitative data regarding the attractiveness of obtaining and retaining teaching positions in rural schools. The findings were disappointing as they found the current monetary incentives were not attractive enough to have an effect on educator placement. The study found a need to increase the incentives and improve the program to identify the “ruralness” of various districts and adapt their incentives based on available data. The study even suggested the government placing teams of friends in rural schools, as research suggests camaraderie alleviates loneliness (Mwenda & Mgonezulu, 2018.)

When we know that small, rural schools do not often provide competitive salaries in relation to larger school districts there must be something that draws teachers to positions. There is a need for research to identify all relevant factors that influence an educator’s decision to seek employment in a small, rural school district. Small, rural schools often share information about their attractive calendars, small class sizes, and district culture to attract educators to come to their schools. This study will attempt to seek information to affirm the qualities of small, rural schools that lead to the recruitment of teachers, and then what factors contribute to the retention of these teachers.

A study by Reed and Busby (1985) found when rural Virginia schools were able to offer incentives and rewards, they faced lower teacher attrition rates. Their study recommends rural superintendents find ways to find housing for their new teachers. In small, rural communities, it is often very difficult to find housing. Other suggestions included assisting spouses of new teachers in finding jobs, offering tuition to take continuing education courses, and providing social activities for teachers and rewards for superior teachers. Reed and Busby (1985) also found rural schools that participated in “Teacher Appreciation Day” activities and related programs faced lower teacher attrition rates as well.

A more recent meta-analysis of the research literature related to teacher attrition and retention found there was not evidence to support a statistically significant difference in teacher attrition rates from larger schools compared to smaller schools. This meta-analysis creates a synthesis of findings from 120 studies and updates from previous research to include an expanded conceptual framework relating various factors that contribute to teacher attrition and retention (Nguyen, Pham, Springer & Crouch, 2020.) While this finding suggests attrition rates are comparable across all sizes of school districts, there is a need for a deep dive into the characteristics of varying size school districts that contributes to retention. What qualities of small, rural schools contribute to retention?

Goodpaster et al. (2012) conducted a study of rural STEM teachers in rural schools to determine factors relating to their attrition and retention. The researchers found the teachers relayed strong interpersonal relationships and community ties, school factors, and professional factors were the biggest areas that contributed to attrition and retention. The teachers reported each of these areas contained both positive aspects and challenges related to their employment. Interviews with the six teachers who were the focal point of this study revealed the teachers who

had become integrated into the community found great satisfaction in their positions and they described the efforts needed to become part of the community and establish boundaries. While there are challenges to being a rural teacher, such as multiple preps, and lack of university resources, the benefits of the connections that are made, and real world connections created strong points in favor of teaching in a small, rural setting.

The study by Goodpaster et al. (2012) brings a small sample size to the table and represents a case study that takes a deep dive into the factors causing teachers to stay in their positions in small, rural schools. When working with small, rural schools, whose student populations are under 200 students, the sample size is inevitably going to be smaller. Despite the smaller sample size, there is a lot to be learned from surveys and conversations with teachers in small, rural schools to garner a deeper understanding of their desire to stay in their positions, or the decision to leave their position.

Relating to these positive feelings, Goodpaster et al. (2012) noted, there appears to be a correlation to the sense of belonging and job satisfaction and therefore retention. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) conducted a robust study to analyze teachers' feeling of belonging, emotional exhaustion, and teacher job satisfaction. The authors examined teachers' perceptions of six school context variables and their feeling of belonging, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and motivation to leave the teaching profession. This study is particularly interesting as it shares the connections between various aspects of the teaching perceptions and their contribution to a feeling of belonging, exhaustion or burn-out, and overall teacher job satisfaction. The authors found a teacher's sense of belonging had a negative correlation with their desire to leave the teaching profession. When teachers felt they did not belong, they tended to experience

emotional exhaustion, which has a direct and indirect effect on leaving the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

There is a need for more current research on this topic relating to teacher satisfaction and retention that would bring to light things rural schools can do to recruit and retain teachers when raising salaries is not an option. The COVID-19 global pandemic can not be ignored as the unique challenges brought about by the disease has created an additional layer of stress that appears to be contributing to teacher job satisfaction and desire to retain positions.

There is a recent study by Oyen and Schweinle (2021) that studies the factors that encourage teachers to consider teaching in rural settings. This study collected a variety of data related to sample participant's demographics and sought a correlation between factors and the desire to teach in a rural school setting. The study found that educators who specialized in an area as opposed to generalized, were more likely to seek employment in a rural school district. The authors were surprised by this finding and hypothesize this could possibly be due to the impression there is less job competition in a rural school setting. Ultimately, they recommended districts attempt to recruit staff members from within their communities (Oyen & Schweinle, 2021).

Oyen and Schweinle, 2021, are not clear on the size of school they considered rural. There is a need to take what can be learned from their research and narrow the focus to the factors of small, rural schools (schools with fewer than 200 students), that encourage teachers to apply for positions within the district. Looking at small, rural schools and the factors specifically related to those schools that bring teachers to them will shed light on information that has yet to be uncovered.

Tran and Smith published multiple studies in 2020 that specifically dealt with teacher recruitment and retention in rural schools. Their mixed methods analysis of employment-related conditions revealed many teachers choose the profession for altruistic reasons and truly want to make a difference in their job. Many rural schools do not leverage this component and Tran and Smith (2020) recommend job descriptions in small, rural schools specifically discuss the opportunity for teachers to make a difference and connect with students. Their research also found a supportive administration as the most important factor related to choosing a teaching position. When studying small, rural schools, if administrators can provide support and assistance to teachers as they face challenges, teachers will feel more satisfied in their roles. This strong administrative support coupled with autonomy connections with students will contribute to teachers remaining in their teaching roles over time.

Conceptual Framework

As teacher turnover and retention in schools and dive into the consequences that result are examined, factors leading up to this catastrophic phenomenon in education must be researched. Teacher attrition is affected by leadership styles and administrative support, and overall teacher satisfaction. There is an underlying web of factors which connect administrative support to teacher satisfaction, as well as a host of contributing factors to overall teacher satisfaction. If administrators can provide the necessary support and leadership teachers need, and teachers' needs are met throughout their daily interactions at school, leaders can increase teacher satisfaction and therefore decrease teacher attrition.

I regularly share with my teachers, "our students' perceptions are reality". The same applies to teacher perceptions in regards to administrator effectiveness. When teachers feel supported and their principals are effective, they are less likely to leave their current position

(Player, Youngs, Perrone, & Grogan, 2017). Player et al. also acknowledged the importance of principal preparatory programs providing administrator candidates with the knowledge and tools necessary to support teacher retention, and develop the leadership behaviors associated with lower teacher attrition.

One obvious factor which contributes to teacher satisfaction is salary. Imazeka (2005) found that increasing a district's salary base, in relation to schools around it, can reduce teacher attrition, or teacher *transfer*. When teachers are looking to transfer to another school, if the salaries of other schools in the area are not as competitive, the idea of moving is not enticing and teachers are more likely to stay put. However, salary has little effect on teachers who intend to leave the field altogether. Imazeka's research did not find a correlation between higher salaries and a person's willingness to stay in a profession once they had made the decision to leave it entirely (Imazeka, 2005).

The last point shared from Imazeka's research, causes me to consider what other factors play a strong role in teacher satisfaction. Two points I immediately begin to theorize and research are the role of staff morale and community support in teacher satisfaction. Intuition would tell us when someone feels they are part of a team or family, and the overall atmosphere is a positive one, an individual will find more satisfaction in their work. Research by Skaalvik, and Skaalvik (2011) finds this to be true.

One key finding from the Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) study is the influence of teacher belonging on teacher satisfaction. Teachers who felt they belonged and were part of a team were less likely to be motivated to leave the profession entirely. This finding supports the idea that "belonging" is a "fundamental psychological need". If an educator does not find this camaraderie and feel a part of the team, they are more likely to feel the emotional distress that

leads to “burn-out” and ultimately leaving the profession entirely. Factors such as supportive administration, and positive relationships with parents and colleagues contribute to a teacher’s feeling of belonging (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). It is this researcher’s opinion, finding those positive relationships with parents causes one to feel supported by the community in general.

Examining my initial research on teacher effectiveness as it relates to attrition, the findings from Henry, Bastian, and Fortner (2011) cause me to take pause and reflect on the possible damage being done to our students as teacher attrition takes place year after year. Henry et al. found teachers who chose to leave the profession were less effective in their final year of teaching compared to their prior years of experience. As our teachers are making these conscious decisions to leave, they are not putting full effort into their responsibilities and therefore, are not producing the same quality of results they had previously. Then, once they leave, districts who are not competitive in pay to compete with neighboring schools are often forced to hire brand new teachers, and once again climb the ladder of growing their effectiveness throughout their first three years.

Less attention in the research has been paid to the contributing factors concerning the retention of teachers in rural schools. The research noted earlier describes the connections between the attributes of small, rural schools, and the likelihood teachers return to their positions year after year. We must extend the research to identify the areas we can focus on, specifically in small, rural schools, to increase teacher retention and make our schools a desirable place of employment.

Chapter Summary

As a superintendent of a small, remote, rural school district, I do not have a lot of control over having the funds available to support an increase in pay; however, I do have the authority to

oversee the general culture of my building to ensure other relevant factors contributing to teacher satisfaction are being met. My intention with this project is to uncover the reasons teachers choose to stay employed at small, rural schools, so as to decrease teacher attrition. I am interested in both teachers who leave the profession entirely, and those who leave our district for another teaching position elsewhere. Our students deserve the quality of education they can receive from tenured, high-quality teachers, and I see it as my responsibility as Superintendent, to ensure all the necessary supports are in place to create as much teacher retention as possible and alleviate the constant attrition in our district.

CHAPTER THREE – INQUIRY METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher retention in small, remote, rural school districts in Southwest Missouri. The study also investigated the factors in these school systems leading to teacher attrition and turnover. Defining a small, rural school can be complicated as rurality is defined by different measures in the existing peer-reviewed research. Rurality is also further complicated by local community nuances (Tran & Smith, 2020). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) describes any area outside of an urbanized area, one with a population of fewer than 50,000, as a rural area. The NCES also defines a remote, rural school as one that is “census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster”. In this study, these broad definitions of rurality are combined with a community supported definition of a small, rural school as being defined as one that has fewer than 200 students. In the conference of schools this study focuses on, each of the remote, rural schools has fewer than 200 students and only one principal. These smaller, rural schools operate differently because they employ only one staff member per grade level and one teacher per content area for grades seven through twelve. The communities where these small, remote, rural schools lie are all considered “bedroom communities”, where citizens commute to larger towns for work and business.

There is an absence of research focusing specifically on small, rural schools and the information gleaned from this research will help decision makers in these school systems by supplying informative data that is relevant to their specific rural school setting. The study uses a mixed methods research approach. A mixed methods research approach combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This study includes quantitative retention and

attrition data, as well as qualitative data regarding teacher retention and turnover in small, rural schools. Missouri data regarding teacher shortages across the state will be utilized to further explain the problem facing small, rural schools in an attempt to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers. The methodological approach is practitioner research, as the study analyzes various components in the school setting that limit or contribute to teacher turnover and retention.

The research focuses on three specific questions:

Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

Question 2: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?

Question 3: What specifically can district-level leaders in small, remote, rural schools do to improve the retention of teachers?

Rationale

Practitioner research is valuable to this area of study because school leaders in small, rural schools have a front-row seat to the struggles of recruiting and retaining quality educators within their systems. As a practitioner, I can make observations directly related to my school district and the things I learn from this study will directly influence my school system as a whole. District level leadership can influence teacher recruitment and retention, but the question is “How?” Survey data for this study measures factors relating to teacher satisfaction and belonging and teacher’s decisions to stay in their position or leave the rural school setting.

Only teachers who are voluntarily leaving the school district were included in the sample of participants due to the potential for inaccurate data when employees are leaving involuntarily and on poor terms with the district. Practitioner research creates a scenario where I potentially

know and have relationships with individuals used in the sample of this study so we need to exclude any individual who might be leaving involuntarily.

Mixed methods research allows the collection of quantitative data regarding teacher attrition and turnover, as well as qualitative data regarding individual participant data related to their decision to stay or leave the small, remote, rural school setting. Survey data can reveal patterns and trends in retention and turnover, and interview data can uncover those hidden features of small, rural schools that attract and retain teachers over the years. This method allows for a deeper understanding of the topic than could be obtained using a single approach (Creswell, 2014). While I conducted a survey to collect quantitative data related to retention and turnover of teachers in small, rural schools, in order to answer my research questions one and two, there was a need for an examination of qualitative data that explains the information within a survey and allows me to answer research question three (Terrell, 2016). Tran (2020), used a survey tool to examine the relative importance of a variety of factors related to working conditions and found the method to be useful to gather a variety of data from various teachers across schools. Using a survey is a quick and simple tool that allows the researcher to give identical questions to all survey participants and collect data to analyze trends.

Modeling the quantitative piece of this study after Tran and Smith's study from 2020, a utility analysis was used to measure the comparative importance of a variety of factors related to working conditions and perceptions of small, rural schools. Huber, 1974, completed a review of field and field-like studies that used the multiple-attribute utility (MAU) model. MAU Theory asks the participant to assign one specific attribute as "most important" and then rank the other listed attributes relative to what they chose as "most important". Assigning a point system to

these rankings allows the researcher to calculate a utility rating that can be used to predict decisions and actions of others in the future.

The utility analysis method can be more reliable compared to using a Likert scale to measure perceptions of each individual factor (Johnson, 1995). When survey participants are faced with a single condition and asked to place its level of importance on a scale from “not at all important” to “very important”, most teachers would likely rank all conditions as “very important”. A better representation of the actual trade-offs teachers face when choosing a place of employment is to offer this utility analysis where they can select the most preferred trait when given two options (Tran & Smith, 2020).

Qualitative data from teacher interviews and embedded open ended questions within the survey will provide a narrative to compare the quantitative results from the survey. Transcripts of the interviews and the open-ended survey questions will be recorded and a qualitative analysis will be conducted of the findings.

Problem Setting/Context

The Golden Valley Vernon County (GVVC) Conference is located primarily in Southwest Missouri with schools as far south as Bronaugh, MO and as far North as Chilhowee, MO. Bronaugh R-VII is a rural school district located in Vernon County in southwest Missouri. There are eight small, rural schools that make up the GVVC Conference. Each district has fewer than 250 students enrolled and operates as a Prek-12 school district. There is one teacher per grade level at the elementary level (grades Preschool through sixth) and at the junior high and high school level (grade seven through twelve) there is one teacher per content area. Each junior high and high school teacher has six to seven different classes to prepare for each day as they teach all grade levels the appropriate course content. With the exception of one district,

Northeast Vernon County, each school has one principal. Northeast Vernon County has two separate buildings in two geographically isolated small towns in the northeastern corner of the county. One building houses PreK through 6 and the other 7-12. Each building has its own principal.

Each of the communities that are home to these small, remote, rural schools are considered farming communities. There are many acres of farmland in each district and students are scattered throughout the countryside. Very few students live in town in each of the communities. Each community faces struggles to find housing for individuals who want to move into the community, including families with students and teachers. The few people who do live in the town consider it a “bedroom community”, meaning they come home at night to sleep but work, and do all of their business in surrounding, larger towns.

Extra monetary compensation is not an option for keeping teachers so other considerations must be made. In general conversation with our staff, I know the academic calendar is enticing to many of them. With a shortened year and our calendar calculated on hours, it is advantageous to teachers to work for our district with the promise of three full months off in the summer, and other days throughout the school year. Small class sizes and strong community support seem to be reasons teachers choose to stay in our district.

It is important to note some teachers who come to these rural schools struggle to acclimate to the small setting and close-knit nature of the community. In a rural school setting, the small class sizes create an atmosphere where everybody knows everybody. When something happens in the third-grade classroom, every single third-grader in the district and their parents will know about it that evening. There is full transparency within the school. In a small school setting, tight, personal connections can give a disgruntled parent or community member an

amplified voice, which can create challenges for a teacher just entering the field. Administration in our district must play a role in providing the support necessary for teachers to grow and foster better relationships.

Bronaugh R-VII has had a troubled 2018-2019 school year with the superintendent leaving in October, 2018. During this time, the community came together and supported the Board of Education and faculty as challenges were faced. Our town depends on the school for survival. Evidence of the community support for the school is shown in the results of the April election as the people passed a \$0.675 levy increase with an almost 73% vote in the affirmative.

Aside from financial stability, our district's success lies with our faculty. Administration, teachers, and support staff who remain will be a sign of success. The district sets a goal every year as part of the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan to recruit and retain quality employees. Not only do we focus on high-quality teachers, but we are also concerned with our support staff's performance as well and recognize their contribution to our district's success.

Our district has experienced poor performance on state assessments and the areas of lowest student performance tend to reflect positions with nearly annual teacher turnover. Lowering our level of attrition and retaining teachers in our math and upper elementary teachers will provide consistency for students and provide an opportunity for student growth. A summary of the district's Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) results from 2019 is found in Table 1:

Table 1

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) 2019 Results for Bronaugh R-VII

Content Area	Grade	Level Not Determined	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
ELA	04	0.0	*	64.3	28.6	*
ELA	05	0.0	26.7	46.7	20.0	6.7

Table 1 Cont.*Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) 2019 Results for Bronaugh R-VII*

Content Area	Grade	Level Not Determined	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
ELA	06	0.0	38.9	50.0	*	*
ELA	07	0.0	30.8	30.8	15.4	23.1
ELA	08	0.0	20.0	65.0	10.0	5.0
ELA	E2	0.0	31.3	*	43.8	*
Mathematics	04	0.0	35.7	42.9	*	*
Mathematics	05	0.0	53.3	46.7	*	*
Mathematics	06	0.0	50.0	44.4	*	*
Mathematics+	07	0.0	38.5	46.2	*	*
Mathematics+	08	0.0	60.0	40.0	*	*
Mathematics	A1	6.7	57.1	35.7	*	*
Science	05	0.0	40.0	46.7	*	*
Science	08	0.0	35.0	55.0	*	*
Science	B1	0.0	26.7	53.3	13.3	6.7

Note. Scores of 7th and 8th grade students who took the Algebra 1 End-of-Course assessment are not included in these results. The asterisk denotes a category where the sample size was smaller than five and therefore the results are excluded by the state as it would make it easy to identify individual students using this data.

The dynamics in this building shifted as I established myself as the Superintendent and handed the duties of the principal over to our new hire, who we promoted from a teaching position in the district. There have been many things implemented in our district in relation to staff morale. We have implemented teacher of the year programs, games, and activities throughout the year for morale boosts, and planned treats to show appreciation for teachers throughout the school year. I have been asked multiple times if the new principal will maintain these things because our staff overwhelmingly love them and appreciate the dynamic they bring into our days. I hope to maintain these things while in my new role, while also balancing

guiding and providing autonomy for the new building level leadership. Part of my responsibilities as a new superintendent will be to foster the growth of our new principal and provide him with the resources to feel confident in his new role so that, in turn, he can provide the needed support our faculty needs.

The superintendency can feel isolating and I will rely on the knowledge I have gained over the years to ensure I am utilizing my network and continuing to grow as an administrator so I can better serve our faculty members and bring about a reduction in teacher attrition in our district. In a small, rural school, there is opportunity for district level leaders to take a hands-on approach to improving teacher retention.

As a result of the study of my problem of practice, I want to uncover those factors which keep quality educators employed at rural schools, despite salaries not competitive to those in neighboring districts. Teacher attrition matters because it ties to student achievement and the overall success of the school district.

Research Sample and Data Sources

This study included certified teachers at Bronaugh R-VII school and other small, remote, rural schools of comparable size who are in the GVVC Conference. Teachers who are remaining in the district and those who are leaving were participants in the study. Due to the small sizes of each district, all certified teachers who voluntarily choose to participate were included in the sample. Only teachers who had good evaluations on file and those who are voluntarily leaving the district were considered samples in the study. I did not include teachers who were non-renewed or who were asked to resign because the survey questions will not have responses that would align with those choices for leaving their teaching position. When teachers are involuntarily leaving their position, there is potential for legal proceedings or board policy that

would need to be followed related to their recent employment and negative experiences could skew data.

Survey data was collected regarding specific factors that specifically affect the teachers' decisions to leave or stay in the school district. Participants' responses were protected by conducting the surveys online with participation being voluntary and the participants' identity will be kept anonymous. All teachers in the eight conference schools who were offered renewal within their district were given the opportunity to participate in the survey if they desire. Questions were presented as a utility analysis to give the participant an opportunity to choose the most desirable qualities of school districts.

Twelve teachers were randomly selected to conduct interviews with and to hold in depth discussions regarding their initial employment in the district, their time in the district, and the factors contributing to their decision to either continue employment in the district or leave. Teachers who are leaving the profession entirely, leaving to seek employment in another district, and teachers who are retiring will be included in the sample to be selected for interviews. The sample will also include teachers who are remaining in their position at a small, rural school.

Data Collection Methods

Data Source

Approval was obtained from the University of Arkansas's Institutional Review Board and the School District prior to collecting data. Before dissemination of the survey, a formal request was made with the district superintendent at each small, rural district, to allow teachers to communicate with the researcher. Communication was made with the teachers by sending emails detailing the purpose of the study and asking for their participation.

Survey

A survey using Qualtrics, see Appendix C, was administered to all participants to collect data on research questions one and two. The survey questions relate to teacher satisfaction and their reasons for staying in their position at a small, rural school versus leaving for another career or another school. Surveys were used as an anonymous source of information in the district to ensure teachers feel safe to answer questions regarding satisfaction with their employment.

The survey was sent in an email to the superintendent of each of the conference schools and they will be asked to forward it to their certified teachers. Informed consent was provided and explained in the email. It took approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. The survey contained questions that presented a utility analysis to the participant and asked the teacher to choose most preferred specific traits related to small, rural schools. Question one asked the teacher to identify whether or not they grew up and attended a small, rural school. Question two asked the participant to answer whether, at the time of the survey, they intended to remain in their teaching position the next year. Depending on their response to the second question, they were taken to a section asking them to rank attributes that were influential in their decision to either leave or stay in their position. If they are leaving, they were also asked to identify if they are leaving their position for another district, another position in the same district, a career change, to stay home, or for retirement. The survey contained open ended questions asking teachers to expound on their answer as the attribute that was most influential in their decision. The last question asked if there are any final thoughts they'd like to share regarding teaching in a small, remote, rural school.

Table 2 lists the factors of small, remote, rural schools and participants were asked to rank them from most important (1) to least important (19).

Table 2
Specific Attributes Present at Small, Remote, Rural Schools

Variables

Medical benefits

Retirement benefits

Salary

Annual Raises

Commute time to work

Distance to closest town with access to groceries, restaurants, medical care, etc

Class size

School administrative support

Opportunity to give input on school decisions

Sufficient textbooks and class materials

Up to date school technology

Clean and safe school facilities

Academic performance of students at school

Degree of parental involvement in children's education at the school

Relationships with colleagues

Ability to be an effective teacher

Work schedule that provides summers off

Teacher licensure requirements

Ongoing coaching to help with teaching students

Note. Table includes factors identified in previously conducted research by Tran & Smith (2020) as relevant to retention in rural schools.

Interviews

Interviews were used to gather data for research question number three. Interviews were conducted with teachers in small, rural schools regarding best practices for lessening teacher turnover and increasing teacher satisfaction with their employment. The interview included questions related to their initial employment in the small, remote, rural school and their time working there. There were also questions relating to their satisfaction in their current position. Interviewing teachers allowed the researcher to hear the subject's story and develop an understanding of their experiences and how experiences affect their perceptions (Seidman, 2013).

Interview participants were emailed to request their consent to participate in the study. Participants were provided with information related to the interview and were informed there are no risks or benefits from participating in the interview and their identity will remain anonymous to readers of the study. Interviews were conducted face to face when possible, but there was also the opportunity to meet via Zoom. Each interview took up to one hour. Interviews will be recorded and I took the liberty of asking for further clarification or focusing on a particular answer if I was led in a certain way.

The interview also asks questions to determine if there is a correlation between teacher pay and satisfaction with their position at a small, rural school. Interview analysis was used to determine if there is a point at which non-monetary factors of employment in the school district outweigh the opportunity cost of working in a district where teachers would be paid more money. Reflecting back on Herzberg et al. (1957) motivation-hygiene theory, interview questions will investigate the root factors causing teachers to remain in their position and question if those reasons are related to internal motivation and a feeling of a "calling".

Data Analysis Methods

To conduct this study, surveys were sent via email to the certified teachers in the eight rural schools in the GVVC Conference. The survey instrument captured data regarding how teachers were recruited and specific factors which influence decisions regarding choosing to stay or leave a rural school district. A utility analysis was used to measure comparative importance of a variety of factors related to working conditions and perceptions of small, remote, rural schools. George Huber, 1974, completed a review of field and field-like studies that used the multiple-attribute utility (MAU) model. MAU Theory asks the participant to assign one specific attribute as “most important” and then rank the other listed attributes relative to what they chose as “most important”. Assigning a point system to these rankings allows the researcher to calculate a utility rating that can be used to predict decisions and actions of others in the future.

The open-ended questions within the survey and the interviews will made up the qualitative data for this study. Analysis followed Cresswell’s (2009) process for examining qualitative data. First, the data was organized into a manner that prepares the researcher for clear interpretation of the data. Second, I read through the data and developed an understanding of what was shared by participants. The third step was to code the data and bring out areas of consistency across interviews and open ended questions. Next, I developed a list of themes found throughout the provided answers. The fifth step was to identify any themes that seem to be related and define how that relationship exists and finally, I used the information I have gleaned to draw conclusions and answer my third research question.

Trustworthiness

The size of the districts and closeness of faculty members proves a threat to the study as sample participants might feel pressured to answer questions in a certain way. To address this

concern, the survey data was completely anonymous to ensure opinions are true reflections of participants' opinions relating to employment at a rural school and the factors which contribute to their decision to leave or remain employed by the district.

Participant validation strategies were used to lead discussions with interview participants and ensure the transcripts of the interviews and their intended perspectives are adequately captured. I asked participants to review transcripts and determine if there was anything they would change about the way their perspective was transcribed or if there were any elements of their perspective I missed. I followed guidance from Ravitch and Carl, (2016), when conducting these validation strategies with participants.

My role as superintendent creates the unique opportunity to be both a researcher and a participant in my study. This position also creates an opportunity for bias in the study and the need for structured reflexivity practices. I must constantly scrutinize my work and my positionality within the research while conducting my research to ensure my study is valid. Specifically, as I proceed through faculty interviews, I need to reflect on my engagement in the interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Limitations and Delimitations

One limitation of this study was the small size of the school districts. The sample was limited to those employees who volunteer to participate in the data collection. The staff at Bronaugh is very small and the data collected was only compared to other rural districts of similar size. All grades, pre-K through twelve, are situated on the same campus and there is only one building for elementary and one building for grades seven through twelve. Specials teachers, administration, counselors, and support staff are shared throughout the district. The other seven schools in the GVVC Conference are all of similar size and demographic.

I am choosing to only focus on the eight schools within the GVVC Conference as they are all similar in size, and demographic of both their student and teacher populations. The decision was also made to only use certified individuals as study participants. The nature of employment for non-certified staff varies greatly and to create consistency throughout the study, only those individuals who hold certificates through the state of Missouri were included in the study. The study included individuals who hold substitute teaching certificates and are employed with the districts as full-time substitute teachers due to a lack of appropriately certified candidates.

Summary

Teacher turnover and attrition rates cause many issues for schools, especially those in rural settings where it is already hard to find highly qualified staff to fill roles. This research study opens the doors to new knowledge regarding what rural schools can do to attract and retain great teachers. Survey and interview data reveal features of rural schools that cause teachers to want to stay, and should open our eyes to areas of concern that contribute to attrition. As a result of this practitioner research study, strategies can be implemented to stop the turnover in our rural school and maintain consistent staffing throughout our district. Small, remote, rural schools have to get creative regarding their recruitment strategies, and the secret to retaining great teachers may lie in our initial recruitment strategies.

CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors within small, remote, rural school districts in Southwest Missouri that influence teacher retention. This study also investigated the factors in these school systems that lead to increased teacher attrition and turnover. A mixed method approach was used to further explore factors related to retention and turnover in small, remote, rural school districts.

This study allows for the deeper understanding of this topic based on the application of a mixed method study (Creswell, 2014). This study represents a true mixed method approach due to the inclusion of quantitative data related to teacher rankings of factors relating to their decision to retain their position or leave their position entirely as well as qualitative data collected from both the survey and individual teacher interviews. Research questions one and two depend on the quantitative survey data and qualitative survey and individual teacher interview data while research questions three relied on the qualitative data collected in part of the individual teacher interview.

Quantitative data presented in this study used a utility analysis to measure levels of importance of factors related to decisions to retain or leave their position. In a utility analysis, participants are asked to rank attributes, choosing the most important attribute as number one, then ranking the other attributes as they relate to the “most important” attribute. A review of field and field-like studies that used the multiple attribute utility (MAU) model by George Huber, 1974, showed that using a utility ranking allows the researcher to predict decisions and actions of others in the future. The qualitative data collected in part of the survey and in the individual teacher interview allowed for a detailed narrative to support the quantitative data.

The qualitative analysis of this study was based on survey findings collected from 20 teachers who were employed in small, remote, rural school districts and who had the opportunity to return to their school district the next year if they chose. Qualitative analysis also included individual teacher interview data from 11 teachers from small, remote, rural school districts who had the opportunity to return to their school district the following year if they desired. The quantitative analysis was also based on the survey findings and included data from the responses from the same 20 teachers who completed the survey in its entirety.

The mixed method study sought to answer the following research questions.

Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

Question 2: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?

Question 3: What specifically can district-level leaders in small, remote, rural schools do to improve the retention of teachers?

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data in this study were collected through the use of a teacher survey administered to teachers in small, remote, rural schools in the Golden Valley Vernon County Conference whose administrators had determined they had the opportunity to return to their teaching position the following year if they desired to do so. These data were analyzed and used to answer two of the research questions selected for this study:

Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

Question 2: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?

Thirty-four individuals provided consent to participate in the individual teacher survey. Two of the responses had to be omitted because the individuals did not answer any information beyond agreeing to consent to the survey. The 10 individuals who indicated they were not returning to their teaching positions for the next school year did not complete the portion of the survey where they were to rank the attributes as they related to their decision to leave their teaching position. Several of these 10 individuals indicated in their narrative that the reasons listed did not apply to their reason to leave their teaching position and while they enjoyed working in their districts, they had specific reasons for not continuing in their position. These ten individual survey responses were omitted because while they provided limited qualitative data, they did not provide needed attribute rankings. There were also two survey responses where the participant indicated they intended to return to their teaching position; however, they did not complete the entire survey including the ranking of the attributes and therefore were omitted from the official results also. This created a total of 14 surveys omitted and 20 surveys with usable data. Therefore, the survey response rate among participants was 58.82%.

Research Question 1

Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

The teacher survey did not have enough participants who indicated they were leaving their teaching position. The sample size was very small and of the ten individuals who selected “no” as the response to the question asking if they were returning to their position for the next

school year, their surveys were left mostly incomplete resulted in those responses being omitted from the final data set.

Research Question 2

Question 2: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?

All 20 survey participants who had usable data indicated they intended to return to their teaching position for the next school year. Two of these survey participants reported they grew up in the community and attended school in the community in which they currently work. The participants were all from the eight small, remote, rural schools that make up the Golden Valley Vernon County Conference.

Tran and Smith (2020) authored the original survey that this study's survey was based on. Their survey method asked participants to assign ten points to the factor they felt was most influential in their decision to consider employment at the sample district, then they assigned values to the other factors that compared their importance to their most influential factor. For this study, while the survey used attributes gleaned from and modeled after the Tran and Smith (2020) study, the participants were simply asked to rank the participants in order of influence. The most influential factor was ranked 1 and the least influential factor was ranked 19 with the other factors being in between. The rankings each survey participant assigned to each attribute were added and the sums compared. The lower the sum, the more important overall it was ranked. Tran and Smith (2020) also applied weighted value measures to attributes. Since this study has a significantly smaller sample size and weighting is not needed. The following table details the attributes and their ranking of influence in relation to teacher retention of the survey participants:

Table 3
Attributes Affecting Teacher Retention in Small, Remote, Rural Schools

Attribute	Overall	n who	n who	Avg
	Ranking	ranked #1	ranked	Rank
			1-5	
Supportive school administration	1	7	14	4
The size of your class	2	1	15	4.35
Relationships with colleagues	3	3	15	4.65
Commute time to work	4	2	12	6.25
Your ability to be an effective teacher	5	3	8	7.35
Opportunity to give input in school wide decisions	6	0	5	7.7
Clean and safe school facilities	7	0	10	7.75
Retirement benefits	8	0	4	9.9
Annual raises	9	0	5	10.05
Medical benefits	10	3	5	10.55
Up-to-date technology at school	11	0	2	10.75
Salary	12	0	3	11.05
Availability of sufficient textbooks and school materials for class	13	0	1	11.9
Work schedule that provides for summers off	14	1	4	12.3
The degree of parental involvement in children's education at school	15	0	0	12.6

Table 3 Cont.*Attributes Affecting Teacher Retention in Small, Remote, Rural Schools*

Attribute	Overall	n who	n who	Avg
	Ranking	ranked #1	ranked	Rank
			1-5	
The academic performance of students at the school	16	0	0	13.05
Ongoing professional development to help with teaching students	17	0	0	13.55
Distance to the closest town with access to groceries, restaurants, medical care, etc.	18	0	0	13.7
The teacher licensure requirements	19	0	0	16.8

Notes. Survey participants ranked the above attributes in order as they influenced their decision to retain their teaching position in a small, remote, rural school. The most influential factor was ranked #1, and the least influential was ranked #19 and the other factors were ordered in between.

According to the survey results, the most influential factor affecting teacher retention was presence of a supportive school administration. Fourteen individuals ranked supportive school administration in their top five attributes and seven of those ranked it number one. Fifteen survey participants ranked class size in the top five attributes; however, only one of those ranked it number one. The third highest attribute was relationships with colleagues. Fifteen individuals ranked this attribute in the top five and three individuals ranked it as number one.

Only three individual ranked salary in the top five attributes related to teacher retention and none of the survey participants ranked salary as most influential. The lowest ranked attribute that related to teacher retention according to survey participants was teacher licensure

requirements. The average ranking among the twenty participants for teacher licensure requirements was 16.8 and no participants ranked this factor in the top five.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data were collected through a teacher survey and individual teacher interviews. These data were analyzed and used to answer all three of the research questions selected for this study.

Teacher Survey

As stated previously, there were 34 individuals who participated in the teacher survey; however, fourteen of those responses had to be omitted from the data set due to incomplete survey responses leaving a total of twenty usable survey responses.

Research Question 1

Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

The teacher survey did not have enough participants who indicated they were leaving their teaching position. The sample size was very small and of the ten individuals who selected “no”, their surveys were left mostly incomplete resulted in those responses being omitted from the final data set. The 10 individuals left some qualitative data in the open ended response questions included in the survey; but, these comments were unable to be included due to their surveys being incomplete.

Research Question 2

Question 2: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?

Supportive School Administration. Some of the teacher interview participants described why they chose supportive school administration as their number one most influential factor relating to their decision to retain their teaching position. One individual wrote:

Supportive school administration - I chose this attribute as my most influential reason to stay in my current position because a supportive administration can make or break a school. Whether it's a small school or a big school, a supportive administration can make it feel like your opinions, feelings, and what you do in your classroom is important. Without support at the administrative level, teachers do not feel valued and are more likely to leave or resent their jobs.

Another teacher shared this comment:

The support I receive from administration is HUGE! My administrator trusts me, and allows me to make my own decisions about my classroom. My administrator has my back 100% of the time. If there is a time when I have made a mistake or need some sort of constructive criticism, my administrator is good about doing so in private, and not in front of my colleagues or a parent. My administrator supports continued learning, even if that means my taking a PD which requires me to miss class.

A third teacher shared the following about the administrative support they receive in their school district:

The attribute that I think is most influential is supportive school administration. I have worked at other districts where the administration was not supportive, involved, or upbeat. The administration at the district I currently work for is all of the above and so different compared to other places I have worked. It makes coming to work and doing the hard task of teaching a lot easier and more enjoyable.

Class Size. According to the data collected from the teacher survey, the size of the teacher's class (specifically its small size) plays an important role in many of their decisions to remain employed in their school district. The size of the teacher's class was the second most influential factor according to rankings provided by survey participants. One teacher noted:

I also love my small class sizes. I am able to get more one on one work with my students. I am also able to build relationships with my students more easily because I get to know them better than if I had 20 students in my class.

One teacher wrote in their survey narrative they, “know everyone [they] work with, the students, and their families.” When teachers have fewer students in their classes, they have fewer family they are interacting with each year and this results in more time being dedicated to each family and strong relationships being formed.

Relationships with colleagues

There were many sentiments shared in the narrative portion of the survey relating to the importance of relationships with colleagues. This attribute ranked number three as most influential factor related to teacher retention for the teachers who participated in the teacher survey. Seven of the 20 survey participants used the word “family” to describe their relationship with their colleagues. One teacher shared, “Relationships with colleagues have turned into life-long friendships with whom I can collaborate or cry on an understanding shoulder, depending on the needs of the day.”

Research Question 3

Question 3: What specifically can district-level leaders in small, remote, rural schools do to improve the retention of teachers?

The survey contributes to answering this question as the results of the teacher survey show the most influential factor related to teacher retention is supportive school administration. The narratives in the survey from the teachers provides some insight into ways administrators can improve the retention of teachers. One teacher stated, “Common sense exhibited by our board and admin during these crazy COVID times is the ONLY reason for my returning, especially since I qualify for full retirement benefits.”

In reviewing the narratives provided by teachers in the survey, Table 4 provided partial quotes that directly relate to things administrators are doing that are influential in the decision of teachers to retain their teaching positions:

Table 4

Administrator Actions that Influence Teacher Retention as Reported by Teachers in a Survey

Make teachers feel valued

Be supportive and have teachers' backs

Be involved

Be upbeat/positive

Trust teachers

Provide teachers autonomy to make decisions about their own classrooms

Provide feedback and constructive criticism in private

Support teachers in their quest to continue their learning and education

Communicate clearly with teachers

Note. The actions listed above were gleaned from narratives teachers provided in the open-ended response asking why they chose Supportive School Administration as the most influential factor related to their reason to retain their teaching position for the following school year.

Individual Teacher Interview

Individual teacher interviews were conducted with 11 teachers who are currently employed at small, remote, rural schools in southwest Missouri. These teachers also completed the survey included in this study. The interviews were conducted either in person or via Zoom and followed a semi-structured format following the question list in Appendix B.

Eleven teachers were interviewed for this study. The teachers represented a variety of years of experience, multiple areas of instruction, and were from six of the eight schools in the

Golden Valley Vernon County Conference. Table 5 summarizes factors related to each interview participant:

Table 5
Individual Teacher Interview Participants

Participant	Grades Taught	Years In Position	Staying In Position Next Year?
A	K-12	4	No
B	7-12	2	Yes
C	1 st	24	Yes
D	5 th & 6 th	3	Yes
E	K-12	12	Yes
F	2 nd	9	Yes
G	5 th	2	Yes
H	7-12	8	Yes
I	3 rd	1	No
J	7-12	4	Yes
K	K-6	3	Yes

Note. This table serves to demonstrate the differences in individual teacher interview participants.

Responses to Research Question 1

Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

Two of the participants in the individual teacher interview indicated they did not intend to return to their teaching positions for the following year. Participant A reported they were

officially retiring after 40 years in education. When asked if there were other contributing factors besides retirement benefits, Participant A reported the following:

Perhaps the degree of parental involvement might have had some influence in that as well ... this year I think um, it's more in general. I think everyone is feeling uh, more of that kind of issue with with [sic] parents and their lack of involvement or over involvement.

Participant I had only been in her position for one year but came to the district because she started her career there 25 years prior. She stated:

I wanted kind of a small rural feeling and my daughter teaches here and so I thought it would be a fun experience to teach next door to her and I was in a position in my life where the money wasn't as important as it maybe was before, so I had an opportunity to be able to do that, which I know several people don't get that so I'm pretty blessed there.

Participant I reported she was leaving her district to become a curriculum consultant.

When asked why she was leaving, Participant I said, "I don't have a negative reason. I'm not leaving for that reason ... I'm looking to do some curriculum consulting with some small districts because that is truly my passion." Participant I indicated that while she feels her career as a classroom teacher is coming to an end, she enjoys working with small, remote, rural schools and intends to still be involved, just as an independent consultant.

I also asked the interview participants to describe the least influential factors affecting their decision to leave their positions. The interview participants both individually shared sentiments that they are in districts with strong administrative support so it did not have an influence on their decision to leave. It was also noted by participant A that their salary was not affecting their decision to leave their position as they were retiring.

Responses to Research Question 2

Question 2: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?

To begin the individual teacher interview, each of the 11 participants were asked to describe why they chose to work in their school district. Table 6 details the reasons selected by the interview respondents:

Table 6

Reasons Teacher Interview Participants Chose to Teach in a Small, Remote Rural School

Participant	Reason
A	Opportunity: Right time, right place
B	Retired military, bought a retirement home and relocated
C	Grew up in the district, parents worked there, wanted a small school setting
D	Relationships: had friends in the district
E	Grew up in the district, right time, right place
F	Bought a house in the district, loved the family connections
G	Liked the small atmosphere and family feeling
H	Student taught there, offered a job there, right time, right place
I	Family working in the district, worked there previously
J	Married someone who lived in the community and own a house in the district
K	Wanted to work in a small school, liked smaller class sizes and family-type atmosphere

Reviewing the 11 interview participants' reasons for choosing to work in a small, remote, rural school, it should be noted that none of the interviewed participants mentioned teacher salary as a primary reason they wanted to work at their rural school. For example, Participant B

noted that he actually took a reduction in salary coming to his district but he felt the benefits outweighed the lower salary:

Obviously there was a pay cut from [previous school district], ... but at the same token, ... the amount of responsibility, I mean you have similar responsibility, but the amount [previous district] wanted you to more do, with data collection and all that. And [superintendent and new school] was like “hey, did I tell you we’re going to a 4-day week.” That was like, “send me the numbers so I can start doing calculations.”

Nine of the individual teacher interview participants reported they intend to remain in their position for the following school year. These nine individuals were asked to describe the most influential reason they choose to remain in their teaching position and then identify the least influential reason. Table 7 represents data from those nine individuals:

Table 7
Factors Influencing Teacher Retention

Factor	n
Most Influential Factors	
Class size	4
Ability to be an effective teacher	2
Commute to work	1
Supportive school administration	1
Strong sense of connection with students	1
Intermediate Influential Factors	
Relationships with colleagues	3
Class size	2
Supportive school administration	3

Table 7 Cont.
Factors Influencing Teacher Retention

Factor	n
Least Influential Factors	
Medical Benefits	4
Salary	4
Retirement Benefits	1

Note. Interview participants were shown the list of factors that was in the teacher survey and asked to recall which attribute they had selected as most influential and least influential. One teacher did not report a second most influential factor during the teacher interview.

Class Size. Four interview participants indicated that class size was the most influential reason they chose to remain in their teaching position. Two interview participants said that class size was second most influential. Participant B noted that they came to their small, remote, rural school district from a larger district where they had 25 to 30 one kids in a class. Now his largest class size over the past two years has been 13. Comparing his entire caseload, even though he has more preps, he was only dealing with a total of forty-two students where he had 150 at his previous school.

Ability to be an effective teacher. Participant C noted she continued teaching in her position because of her ability to be an effective teacher. She attributed that ability to small class size and noted she could be effective because she had fewer students in her classroom.

Commute to work. Participant D shared during her interview that she loves working five minutes from her home. As she described why this commute was influential to continue to work here, she related it to her salary. She said, “ ... salary ... not that it is great but for being five

minutes from home and the rural community, yea that sounds great. Get paid and I'm close to home."

Supportive school administration. One teacher interviewed listed the most influential factor influencing their decision to continue their teaching position at a small, remote, rural school was a supportive school administration. Three other interview participants listed it as second most influential. The interview participants provided many examples of ways their administrators show them support and increased the love they have for their job. Participant C shared the following about the effect of a supportive school administration:

I have worked with administration that wasn't very supportive. But on the whole, most of the administration I have ever worked for has been extremely supportive. The more supportive the administration is of the teachers, the more effective I feel as a teacher because ... whenever we are being taught good discipline measures for the classroom: that the more you are praised the better you are going to do, that works for students but it also works for teachers. The more we're praised legitimately, legitimate praise, about things we are doing well, the better we want to be at what we do.

Participant F felt her supportive school administration was a direct result of working in a small, rural school district:

The administrators are more involved in the smaller districts. They're guiding and leading. It's more of a hands on approach because they are so much closer and I feel like at bigger schools you kind of get lost, you don't always know who your administrators are. They are just the boss. So I think being able to have that ability of knowing you can still grow and you can still reach out to your admin, that is a very positive thing. 'Cause I know for me, I don't want to stop growing. Because I know I can always be a better teacher.

Participant G shared similar sentiments regarding the support from school administration. They highlighted the close, personal relationships they were able to create with their administrators as a result of working in a small, remote rural school:

The principal and superintendent here, they don't teach above us, they teach with [us]. They aren't above us, they are with us, they are on the same team. They don't talk down to us, they support us in every way, They have our backs ... in a bigger school you probably wouldn't see that as much. Administration isn't as personal with their staff.

Strong sense of connection with students. Participant H shared the most influential factor influencing their decision to retain their teaching position is the strong connection with her students. She stated:

I have a personal relationship with the students ... parents as well, that is one of the things I like with the small school district. I have taught a lot of their older siblings, known parents for a long time and coaching adds to that, so you know, I have a really good connection.

Participant H was the only teacher who noted this strong sense of connection as the most influential factor related to retention. The other ten teachers also did not mention this relationship in their interview when I asked them if there were other relevant factors. However, we find later in the teacher interview that this strong connection with the kids was noted multiple times as teachers described what they like about their jobs. While this factor is present in teacher remarks who are retaining their positions and is certainly one of the best things they like, we don't see it being listed as commonly as a reason why someone is choosing to stay in their position.

Relationships with colleagues. Three interview participants stated their relationships with colleagues was the second most influential factor causing them to retain their teaching position. Participant B noted there are only around twelve teachers in his current school district. This small number allows for close-knit relationships between all staff members.

Medical benefits. Medical benefits was listed by four interview participants as being the least influential reason they choose to continue teaching in a small, remote, rural school. One teacher noted they "simply could not afford" the school's insurance while the other three shared similar narratives. Two of the other three receive medical benefits from being in the military previously and the third received medical benefits from her husband's place of employment. Three other interview participants reported medical benefits were not influential in their decision

to retain their teaching position, however those are not included in Table 7 because they were not listed as “most influential”.

Salary. Four of the interview participants reported salary was the least influential factor as it related to their decision to retain their teaching position. One participant noted they had even been offered more money to not leave their previous district but salary really did not matter to them:

Salary. I think, when I went to [current school district] I actually went [*sic*] from [previous school district] and the superintendent at [previous school district] at the time when I took the job at [current school district] um, asked if she would give me more money if I would stay on at [previous school district] and I said “no” ... I want to teach at [current school district] specifically and so as long as they pay me a livable wage I’ll stay there.

Another interview participant noted, “Salary, I’m not in it for the salary. I’m in it for these kids. That’s a very textbook answer, but it’s true.” This seemed to be the common sentiment between those who said salary was least influential on their decision to stay in their district. As I will describe in the later sections of this chapter and chapter five, there are other things keeping teachers in their positions despite salary being low.

Retirement benefits. One interview participant listed retirement benefits as the least influential factor in their decision to retain their teaching position and one other interview participant mentioned it as being close to least.

All 11 of the interview participants were asked to describe what they like about teaching in a small, remote rural school. For this question, the participants were not given the list of attributes. The following table represents attributes that were mentioned during the interview and the number of interview participants that noted it was something they liked about working in a small, remote, rural school:

Table 8
Factors Teachers Like About Teaching in a Small, Remote, Rural School

Factor	n
Relationships with colleagues	3
Parental involvement with school	2
Relationships with student families	4
Strong sense of connection with students	6
Small class size	2
Teacher autonomy	2

Note. Not all factors included in this table were in the original list of attributes teachers saw during the survey.

Relationships with colleagues. Three of the teacher interview participants described liking the relationships they have managed to build with their colleagues in a small, remote rural school.

One participant shared:

I like ... being acquainted with really knowing the entire faculty, the high school, the elementary, the entire staff ... the closeness of that, the camaraderie, the willingness to ... help one another is incredible and I think that's unique to a smaller school. And I mean it speaks of the people but it also speaks of the nearness a smaller educational environment.

Another participant shared, "... we can count on each other. I've had other jobs that pay better, and were fantastic jobs but the relationship wasn't there and it was awful. And I would rather be someplace where the pay is not as good but I feel that deep connection."

One interview participant shared a heartfelt sentiment about how he would love his job even more if he had friends at his school and that despite his efforts, he has not found a way to get his peers at school to truly become friends. The participant described that his extra duties at the school are so many that he simply does not have time for friends outside of the school day and he would really like it if he had friends in his building.

Parental involvement with school and relationships with student families. Parental involvement was listed in the teacher survey as an attribute; but, throughout the individual teacher interview this morphed more into a conversation about the relationships teachers build with families. I felt they should be looked at together even though they are separated in the data of data. One participant stated, “You’re dealing with the family as a whole and you get to see the kids grow up more than that one school year that you have them. And you build those connections and those relationships. They know they can always come back to you no matter what and I love that.”

It was touching to hear the teachers talk about these relationships with families and many of them shared they really like the students. That seems a given but while it was not one of the higher ranked attributes that directly related to teacher retention, there was a fondness the teacher interview candidates held for their students that they really enjoyed and that made their job more enjoyable.

Strong sense of connection with students. Comparing the responses to this question to the responses asking the interview participants to identify the most influential factor as it relates to them retaining their teaching position, it was interesting to note the prominence of this factor. While having a strong sense of connection with students was only listed once as one of the top influencing factors, it was mentioned six times as teachers described what they liked about their schools. The interview participants had a common fondness for their students and shared sentiments about the close relationships they formed in these close-knit communities.

Small class size. Two of the interview participants mentioned liking the small class sizes at their school. These small class sizes contributed to the teacher’s ability to build strong connections and feel effective with their instruction.

Teacher autonomy. Two of the interview participants shared sentiments related to the autonomy they feel as employees in their school district. One teacher liked not being “micromanaged” and having the opportunity to teach in his own way. A second participant stated:

I feel like the ability to try new things is there, whereas in a bigger school it’s kind of we get stuck in school wide policies and I really like that [my school district] allows me to be creative and flexible in my own classroom as long as I’m hitting the standards that is an OK thing for me to try new things.

Response to Research Question 3

Question 3: What specifically can district-level leaders in small, remote, rural schools do to improve the retention of teachers?

Individual teacher interview participants were asked what they would change about teaching in these districts. The following table summarizes the attributes these teachers stated they would change:

Table 9

Factors Teachers Would Change About Teaching in a Small, Remote, Rural School

Factor	n
More classroom assistance (paraprofessionals)	1
Increase salary	4
Pay medical benefits	2
Increase classroom technology resources	4
Update curriculum	2
Increase opportunities for collaboration with similar teachers	2
Fewer preps	1

Classroom Assistance. The teacher who reported they would like to see increased classroom assistance had a special education background. He desires the classroom teachers to have more paraprofessionals so the special student populations are better served. This participant has seen teachers become overwhelmed in classroom settings where teachers are serving students of all abilities in one room and trying to differentiate their instruction and ensure they are also meeting Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). When there are paraprofessionals in the classroom to provide support to students with IEPs it can make things easier on the classroom teacher. This participant felt this additional support would make teachers less stressed about their jobs and more satisfied with their abilities.

Salary and medical benefits. Four of the teacher interview participants reported they would like to be paid more money for their work in their small, remote, rural schools. It was interesting to note that while salary was not something effecting the retention of the teachers included in this study, many shared they would love to make more money. Similarly, medical benefits was something interview participants shared they would change about their districts even though it was not one of the top reasons teachers are retaining their positions.

Technology resources and curriculum. Four interview participants shared they would update technology resources available to them if they could and two mentioned updating curriculum. The high cost of both of these endeavors was listed as reasons the teachers felt their district were unable to provide updated technology or curriculum programs.

Collaboration and teacher preps. The 11 teachers involved in the individual teacher interviews are all in position where they are the only teacher in their grade level or only teacher for their content area. Two of the participants shared they would find a way for teachers to collaborate if they could change this aspect at their schools. One participant suggested

collaborating with other teachers in similar situations throughout the conference. One participant noted that since he was a department of one, he had a large amount of preps to consider each day. He would like to change the amount of work he has to do to prepare for each day and he added that with COVID and distance learning opportunities, he often has to create lessons in three different ways each day for each of his classes in order to reach all of his learners.

The last questions teachers were asked during the individual teacher interview was to describe what they think administrators could do to encourage teachers to continue working in small, remote, rural schools. The following table shows factors mentioned by teachers during their interview:

Table 10

Teacher reported factors administrators can do to encourage teachers to continue working in small, remote, rural schools

Factor	n
Make teachers feel supported	3
Get to know teachers well and build relationships	5
Open lines of communication	2
Allows teachers to have a voice	1
Give teachers praise/gifts/recognition	3
Increase salary	3
Create a positive atmosphere	1
Provide compensation for teachers who have to travel a distance to school	1
Visibly help out	1

Four of the interview participants shared interesting thoughts about how their administrators are actively doing things to boost morale despite low salaries. Their quotes are captured below:

Whenever we are given praise, whether it is verbal, or in the form of gifts, which sounds bad but I am talking about special days where we bring in food, or where we are given special things, you know in the resource room, we have just a goody table day or where [the administrator] and the counselor bring in things for us, sonic drinks, those kind of things ... whenever anybody does anything special they feel so loved. That makes up for low salary, that makes up for a parent that just ripped you, it makes up for so many things that just to have somebody say, 'wow you're doing a great job, thank you'. I know when I get a parent note ... just telling the teacher thank you and 'wow you are doing a great job'. I can go off of that for days, it makes a difference.

I mean obviously everybody would like to see more pay but to be able to get that pat on the back and say 'I see you, I recognize you, thank you, I wish I could give you a pay raise but I can't so have a candy bar.' It really does, to be recognized. If you're working your tail off and nobody ever says 'Wow you've worked really hard' you're finally like 'Why, nobody even notices what I'm doing.' Even though it's little, just the fact that we're being recognized I think goes a long way. I hear some other rural schools where they aren't being recognized and they're angry and they're frustrated and so then they really just focus on the pay because they aren't getting anything else. I think that helps lessen the blow, we're not going to get more money, but I'm going to have a great Christmas break. It really is about the relationships. It goes a long way.

One participant shared they would really like their administrators to continue supporting them and shared this, "So there's only one thing I wish our superintendent and principal would change and it's not bringing up the money because if we didn't love it here, and love the support that they gave us, then we wouldn't be here obviously."

In an attempt to help identify the reasons teachers are retaining their positions when they could leave and go teach in a larger neighboring district, the interview included a question asking the participant to identify things they feel are present in small, remote, rural schools that are different than larger schools. Six of the 11 interview participants shared they felt the relationships with student families and close community feelings were more positive in small, remote, rural schools compared to larger districts. One participant shared:

It goes back to everybody knowing each other and helping and supporting each other. It's that family, we're in it together and you know if one family is struggling with whatever, ten other families are going to jump in and do whatever they can ... and that's kind of a small community more than just small school thing.

Similarly, one participant shared, "... community and parental support are kind of a couple of really big ones. I feel like they really come together for the school and they really appreciate everything that teachers do." Other sentiments shared included the opinion that student behavior and attitude is better in small, remote, rural schools compared to larger school districts.

Data Summary

Both the quantitative and qualitative data point to supportive school administration being a strong factor affecting teacher retention in small, remote, rural schools. The common themes also included the value of small class sizes and the desire of teachers in small, remote, rural schools to receive a larger salary compensation despite pay not effecting retention.

Survey data showed that parental involvement in the school did not influence retention as it was not ranked most influential by any of the survey participants and it was not even ranked in the top five by any survey participants. In contrast, when reviewing individual teacher interview transcripts, six of the 11 participants shared the parental involvement and relationships with parents and families were one of the things they liked best about their jobs.

The data collected from the survey when teachers were asked to rank attributes as they related to their decision to retain their teaching position sheds light on hygiene factors specifically present in small, remote, rural schools. The qualitative data collected via the teacher survey open ended questions and individual teacher interviews allowed participants to back up their choices with their rationale and also provided opportunity for the research to capture the

motivation factors present that are also contributing to teachers' decisions to retain or leave their current teaching positions.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION, CONCLUSION

Introduction

This mixed-method study sought to find specific factors influencing teachers in small, remote, rural school districts to continue teaching or to leave their teaching position. Additionally, this study sought to identify specific things district-level administrators could do to influence teacher retention rates in small, remote, rural school districts. The quantitative data revealed the top three most influential attributes contributing to teacher retention are supportive school administration, the size of the teacher's class, and the teacher's relationship with colleagues. The qualitative data provided narratives to support these rankings and to further identify factors of small, remote, rural schools and their influence on teacher retention. The qualitative data revealed specific things district-level administrators can do to contribute to teacher retention such as make each teacher feel supported, build relationships with teachers and provide teachers with praise and recognition. The following is a detailed analysis of the way this data can be used to improve small, remote, rural school districts.

Problem of Practice

This study sought to examine potential and viable options to address the significant teacher retention and turnover issues prevalent in small, remote, rural, public K-12 schools in Missouri. When these small, rural districts encounter increased teacher turnover rates, the resulting instructional and systemic challenges were amplified by the existing nationwide teacher shortage as well as the unique challenges associated with retaining teachers, specifically in small, remote, rural schools.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data gleaned from this study shed some important insights related to the three research questions presented in this study:

Research Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

Research Question 2: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?

Research Question 3: What specifically can district-level leaders in small, remote, rural schools do to improve the retention of teachers?

Research Literature

While much of the relevant research literature consists of data collected from larger, urban school districts, there are elements of the research findings on teacher retention that can be dissected and applied to districts of all sizes. For example, Imazeki's (2004) research implies that in order to retain teachers, salaries in neighboring districts should be competitive but these relative teacher salaries would have no statistically significant effect on teachers leaving the profession entirely. Unlike Imazeki's research, this study highlights that teachers who are retaining their teaching positions are doing it in spite of comparatively low salaries. These teachers in small, remote, rural schools are retaining their positions because there are other incentives within their districts they believe outweigh the value of their salary.

As referenced in Chapter 4, the interview participants shared a myriad of personal sentiments about how they felt about their own low salaries. For instance, they acknowledged they could make more money other places but also offered rationale for why they choose to retain their current position instead moving to a neighboring district that pays a larger salary. The close relationships with colleagues, students, and the small class sizes outweighed the benefits of a larger salary. Some of the interview participants shared how they are not in the teaching profession for the money and fully understand that if there was more compensation to be

distributed, they know their administrators would provide raises but they were satisfied with the current situation.

Hertzberg's (1957) motivation-hygiene theory assumes that hygiene factors like salary, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions contribute to the initial recruitment of teachers, while the true source of teacher retention was presence of motivation factors like feeling "a calling", and having a purpose. It is interesting to note in the teacher survey, that the results did not necessarily point towards motivating factors being the primary influence in teacher retention, but the teacher narratives did. The attributes included in the list were primarily hygiene factors and the participants were able to rank them and then used motivation factors in their rationale behind their selections. The survey did not include attributes about the participants' internal motivation because this study specifically seeks to find the factors of the school systems themselves that contribute to teacher retention.

Data Collection

This study used a mixed-method approach that included quantitative data collected from a teacher survey as well as qualitative data from a teacher survey and individual teacher interviews. The survey instrument adopted for this study asked participants to report if they intended to remain in their teaching position for the following school year and then asked them to rank attributes by the level of influence to their decision either to remain as a teacher their school or leave the school district. The survey instrument also contains a series of open-ended questions allowing participants to elaborate on their most influential reasons and asked them to share any additional information they would like about their experience teaching in a small, remote, rural school district. The individual teacher interview asked each participant questions related to their individual reasons to retain or leave their teaching position. The interview also

asked participants what they specifically enjoyed about teaching in a small, remote, rural school district and what they would change. In the interview, participants were also asked what they thought were differences associated with being a teacher in a smaller district versus a larger public school district. The final question asked of interview participants were what they thought district-level administrators could do to actively encourage teachers to continue teaching in small, remote, rural school districts.

Data Analysis

The use of quantitative and qualitative data are well-suited for this study because it provides data to capture current reasons teachers are remaining in small, remote, rural schools. Moreover, the teacher narratives provide deeper insights into rationales and help the researcher better understand the implications of the quantitative data results. The teachers participants in this study shared valuable information allowing a detailed view into the contemporary realities of teaching in a small, remote, rural school and the various reasons they continue to remain teachers there. The many nuances collected from the actual teacher attributes affecting retention compared to the data concerning what teachers actually like about their schools and positions proves interesting as they reflect on the many different aspects of their teaching duties and responsibilities.

The study sought to identify specific factors linked to teaching in small, remote, rural schools that are potentially hindering or perpetuating teacher retention rates and what specifically district-level administrators can do to positively increase the retention of teachers in their schools. The study did not collect quantitative data related to specific characteristics of teachers and their self-efficacy and its effect on their retention status. However, the teacher narratives provided in the open-ended questions section of the survey and the individual teacher interviews

provided insights into the thinking of the surveyed teachers as they contemplated their decisions to continue teaching in their school systems. This study attempts to connect the specific attributes in small, remote, rural schools that positively retain teachers as well as the way teachers internalize these attributes and become an integral and valued part of the school system.

Implications for Professional Practice

This study is important to my own professional practice as an administrator in a small, remote, rural school. I encounter daily challenges as a result of teachers regularly leaving their positions. In my district, the teachers at the secondary level teach grades seven through twelve. I have students in eleventh and twelfth grade who have had four different math teachers in the time they have been enrolled in our junior high / high school. This creates a daily and significant struggle for the new math teacher as she tries to identify gaps in understanding and provide support while also teaching new content. Over the past seven years that I have been in the district, I have had six different teachers holding the math position.

Expenses associated with recruiting, hiring, and training a new teacher are significant, especially in relationship to the size and budgetary constraints of a small, remote, rural school district, similar to my district, which, according to Bronaugh's 2021 Annual Secretary of the Board Report (ASBR), is currently operating on a \$2.2 million-dollar budget. These continuing struggles create a sense of urgency as we seek to find better and research informed solutions to the teacher retention problem, specifically in under sourced small, remote, rural schools. This study's findings suggest that attempts to address the research questions presented in this study lead us to some interesting conclusions related to factors associated with retaining teachers in small, remote, rural schools as well as effective methods district-level administrators can leverage their resources to improve teacher retention.

Question 1: What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to leave their teaching positions?

Unfortunately, the survey did not glean enough teacher responses to analyze data to effectively attempt to answer this question from a quantitative perspective. The two interview participants who were leaving their current teaching positions both shared strong, positive sentiments regarding their time in their small, remote, rural schools. One of the teachers is leaving due to retirement eligibility and the second teacher is leaving the district to become an educational consultant and will remain working with smaller, rural school districts.

As previously detailed in Chapter 4, Participant A felt that part of his decision to retire “could” have been influenced by the decreasing level of parental involvement in the school system. Participant A is a special education teacher and I asked him if he was referring to parental involvement with his students in particular or with the student body in general from his observations. He said:

This year I think it’s more in general. I think everyone is feeling more of that kind of issue with with [sic] parents and their lack of involvement or over involvement. Whichever. But I think as far as special education, I think that is year in and year out but the last few years have been different and I think everybody feels that.

Participant A reported that his salary had nothing to do with his decision to leave. He stated, “that doesn’t matter.” He has been in the field of education for 40 years and felt it was time for him to make his exit from this arena. Participant A is in the unique situation of having retired initially from Kansas, then due to living so close to the Kansas and Missouri border, he was able to commute across state lines to work as a teacher long enough in the Missouri public school system to become vested in Missouri’s Public School Retirement System (PSRS). He is now eligible to retire with benefits from Missouri so he will make his exit this year after a long career in public education.

Participant I is leaving her district to pursue a private consulting business where she will actively work with other small, rural schools providing curriculum support and professional development for teachers. She hopes her experience working in small, rural schools will provide a unique lens through which to view the professional development experience for educators in small, rural schools. In my school as well as the other seven schools in our conference, there are not curriculum directors. The principals and superintendents carry the burden of leading curriculum development and leading professional development. The service Participant I is hopeful the service she offers will be beneficial in lightening the load and improving these small, rural schools.

When asked what the least influential reason for leaving their teaching positions, Participant A reported, "Lack of support of administration would be least influential because we have the best support ever from our administration. Salary was not a thing, it's not important." Participant I shared that none of the factors on the list influenced her decision to leave her position. In both situations, we see examples of teachers who are leaving and there is nothing the administrators could have done to prevent their exit. Both participants were at places in their life where it was time to move on, and they both had great experiences working in small, remote, rural schools.

In the future, replicating this study with a larger sample size of participating teachers could possibly result in more respondents filling out the online survey for reasons for leaving and the attributes that are influencing those decisions. The teacher narrative portion of the survey and the teacher interview are important data since they allow the participating teachers to elaborate on their reasons for leaving their teaching positions. Since the attributes listed in the survey are all hygiene factors, it was interesting to note if the teacher participants acknowledged any

motivation factors that are lacking or contributing to their decision to leave their current teaching position.

While the information from this study provides valuable insight into teacher in small, remote, rural schools who are staying, there is much to be learned about those who are making their exit for reasons unlike Participants A and Participant I who are leaving for retirement and a parallel career, respectively. I know there are people leaving my district due to wanting to be closer to their family, wanting a larger salary, and or to pursue an entirely different career other than education. Once a teacher has decided to leave, I wonder if there is even anything an administrator could do to prevent that exit.

***Question 2:** What specific factors of small, remote, rural schools cause teachers to remain in their teaching positions?*

Small, remote, rural schools seem to naturally have smaller class sizes and this was a valued characteristic throughout the study. Participant F shared:

The size of the class is, to me, a huge aspect because it's really how you are able to teach, not really one-on-one, but you'll be able to pinpoint the specific needs of that child and how they learn. And you can find deeper ways into teaching a skill. You can really make that connection and that relationship ... All the kids get the attention they need.

Continuing to support this feature and ensuring class sizes remain small can contribute to improved teacher retention of the teachers in this study. Teachers in this study overwhelmingly shared that they felt the smaller class sizes allowed them to build stronger relationships and truly get to know their students on an individualized level. The teachers in this study who had previously taught in much larger school districts were able to better articulate the difference they feel having much fewer students in their classes and having the ability to work with students on a more one-on-one basis as well as better assist students that are experiencing academic difficulties. These small class sizes and ability to form strong bonds between teachers, students,

and their families leads to teachers feeling more effective at their job and therefore being more satisfied with the work they are doing. Participant J shared his sentiments coming from a larger school district to a small, remote, rural school:

Size of class would be high on the priority there [the list of attributes presented during the interview]. Well, because I did my student teaching at [former school district] and taught 7th grade and there was thirty kids in each class and it was just, it was more like a zoo than it was [a] classroom. And so, I just wanted a class where I could get to know the kids and we could actually dig deep into the material and not spend most of the time on classroom management.

Participant B shared a similar sentiment, reporting:

I absolutely feel like one of the reasons I can be an effective teacher is because of the size of the class ... some of the other teachers I know, here in the US, have twenty-five to thirty students and it's just hard to get around to everybody and give them the attention they need.

Teachers also reported they retain their teaching positions due to supportive school administration. The treats, words of encouragement, and constant support from school administration gives teachers a boost as they do their daily jobs.

It was also noted during the study that teacher autonomy was important to participants and they appreciated working in school districts where they were not micromanaged and given authority to teach their content as they saw fit, as long as they were meeting state standards and providing appropriate instruction.

It was interesting to note that while salary is not something effecting the retention of the teachers included in this study, many shared they would love to make more money. It is a natural feeling to want more money but it is notable the teachers in these small, remote, rural schools have found a balance between their relatively small salaries and their love for their job. To counteract the low-salaries, teachers in the study found joy in connections with students, families, and co-workers. The following statement from participant D summarizes the value of

those relationships: “We can count on each other. I’ve had other jobs that pay better, and were fantastic jobs but the relationship wasn’t there and it was awful. And I would rather be someplace where the pay is not as good but I feel that deep connection.”

Similar to salary, medical benefits was not a factor shown to influence a teacher’s decision to stay in their position but several shared they would like to be able to use the school’s insurance benefit. Participant D said, “I simply cannot afford it [medical benefits].” Participant D also shared if she could change something about working in a small, remote, rural school she would like to be able to afford medical insurance. Participant C shared how important it is to her family that she is able to be on her husband’s insurance:

If it wasn’t for my husband having the jobs that he’s had that has supplied us with insurance that our large family needed, I wouldn’t be able to teach here and afford it. I just wouldn’t be able to. So, we’ve been blessed that he’s been able to do that.

It is possible that a district might not be able to increase teacher salary by a large amount because the combined cost of the raises, coupled with the 14.5% retirement match required in Missouri can be quite burdensome on a district. However, the district could more easily afford increasing medical premium benefits as an attractant to teachers. Recently, the district has been able to raise the amount the district contributes to medical premiums but the district contribution is not quite enough to cover the cheapest plan. A goal is to prioritize this increase to benefit the teachers and increase their satisfaction with their benefit package and job overall.

The teachers in this study shared many sentiments related to their fondness for their students and their connections with the kids and their families. Districts can foster this strong relationship by providing family activities at the school and having teachers attend these to get to know families better and strengthen connections. The teachers in this study felt the families trusted them fully and their relationships were strengthened as they had many siblings from the

same family in their classroom. As teachers spend more years in a district, there are opportunities to teach repeat family members increasing their knowledge of students, families, and the community. This occurs since they are the only teacher in the grade level and therefore the only option for the child when they are in that particular grade.

Often, new teachers struggle when they are new to a community because they feel like a self-reported “outsider” because everyone who has been there longer seems to have ready-made relationships. Teachers are encouraged to find ways to be visible in the community and to build relationships with the families so they can build their trust. If the teacher can retain their position for a few years they will find tensions ease as they find their place in the community and assimilate into the school’s culture and family. The teachers who were individual interview participants were examples of how these strong relationships build job satisfaction as most of them shared common sentiments around the trusting relationships they have with families and how those relationships are one of the best parts of their job.

After conversations with interview participants, specifically Participants C, E, and J, it is obvious when teachers have strong roots within the district they are more likely to retain positions. Participants C and E were both born and raised within the school districts they currently work in. They both shared a similar fondness for the community and school system. They were products of the district and truly believed in the ability of the district to provide a quality education to students. These two teachers truly represent the town the school is in and understand the ins and outs of norms within the community. Participant C shared:

I am from [this district], I almost feel like almost defines who I am. Which isn’t really true, if I had to leave and go somewhere else, I would be able to do that but it would be really difficult because I feel like I’m almost linked so closely, in my own mind it almost defines who I am.

Participant C went on to share that she has worked at her school district through times with “pretty bad administration” but she knew the school board truly cared for the teachers and the district and their strength is what helped her stay the course and not leave her position.

Participant J married a person who had strong roots in the school district where he currently works. When I asked him why he chose to teach in his district he said, “I actually married [my wife]. The [wife’s] family, there’s a lot of them in the area, so we moved to this area and I live two minutes from school.” While he was not born and raised in the community where he works, he married into a family who are deeply rooted and have no intentions of leaving. He told me, “I want to teach at [my school district] specifically and so as long as they pay me a livable wage I’ll stay there.”

***Question 3:** What specifically can district-level leaders in small, remote, rural schools do to improve the retention of teachers?*

Analyzing the data from this study allows for a deeper understanding of the importance of having building administrators to be supportive, caring, positive, and uplifting. Our administrators need to find ways to build the teachers up and showed continued support. In small, remote, rural schools, most administrators have offices in the midst of the school buildings and are able to interact with teachers and students each day. This differs from larger school districts where there are often central office buildings that keep district administration out of the eye of the teachers and students for the most part. Principals and Superintendents who are in their buildings should make efforts to remain visible and assist where necessary. The teachers in this study showed fondness for the servant leadership shown by their administrators. Participant K shared this about the servant leadership they witness:

I really enjoy the administrators here because they’re very hands-on and in and out of our classrooms. They help wherever is needed, it’s not like they are above us or ... we’re

below them, ... they're just one of the staff. ... our superintendent goes to the kitchen in the mornings to help serve breakfast. That type of thing. So we can count on them, if we need them, they're there. ... it makes our job easier.

As Missouri and the nation faces large teacher and staff shortages, it is more important than ever for administrators to step up, lend a helping hand, and do things that some might think are outside the scope of their job description. As noted in chapter four, the teachers in this study noted the morale boosters their administrators provided really helped and they appreciated the effort to give treats and fun things in the absence of the option of a larger salary. The administrators, while not the focus of this study, are facing similar situations regarding lower relative salaries and the teachers appeared to understand everyone in the district would like to make more money and the lower salaries they received were not due to the district simply withholding money from them. All employees in the district receive lower relative salaries but they are committed to their jobs and their schools. Participant C had several things to share about the value of the treats and well wishes she receives from her administrators:

Whenever we area given praise, whether it is verbal, or ... in the form of gifts, which sounds bad but I am talking about special days where we bring in food, food days, or where we are given special things, you know in the resource room, we have just a goody table day or where [the administrator] and the counselor bring in things for us, ... sonic drinks, those kind of things... That makes up for low salary, that makes up for a parent that just ripped you, it makes up for so many things that just to have somebody say "Wow you're doing a great job, thank you!"

To retain teachers in small, remote, rural schools, administrators should show their teachers how valued they are and be sure to give obvious praise and expressions of thanks for the work put in each day. Teachers need to feel needed and like their contributions are benefiting the system and their student. Teachers reported they thrive on accolades from student parents, so if administrators can find ways for parents to give thanks to teachers, it can go a long way to improve morale and retention. Participant C shared, "I know when I get a parent note ... Just

telling the teacher ‘Thank you!’ and ‘Wow! You are doing a great job!’”, I can go off of that for days, it makes a difference. It really makes a difference.” Some examples of this include allowing families to nominate teachers for awards, providing opportunities for families to donate items for fun days for faculty, and by encouraging parents to thank their child’s teacher throughout the school year.

Speaking from personal experience where I am currently in my seventh year of employment, there are only three individuals working here who I did not originally hire, and those three individuals were born and raised in this community and graduated from here. Knowing this, and then hearing from interview participants about their deep ties to the school systems they work in when they are also products of those school systems, leads me to feel a possible solution to recruiting and retaining teachers long term is to establish “Grow Your Own” programs and focus on turning current students, substitute teachers, and other community members into certified teachers. Administrators can take a head-hunting approach to analyzing the work of substitutes and community members who have strengths in particular areas and specifically reach out to them and discuss possibilities of pursuing education degrees and working in the school district (Hood J., & New America, 2021).

Participant F noted the importance of owning a home in the school district in which they worked. They explained it made sense to work in their school district because they lived in the community. We also saw with Participant D, the value of living close to their school district. They noted they liked the five-minute drive from their house. Participant J noted he felt something administrators could do to improve retention was to provide mileage reimbursements to employees who had to travel a distance to their jobs and we can see from the quantitative survey results that commute time to work was the fourth most influential factor as it related to

teacher retention of the survey participants. From my own experiences in looking to buy a home in my current school district, and from conversations with others who are trying to buy homes in small school districts, there are not many options available. In these small, remote, rural schools, they are most often surrounded by large family farms who are not willing to parcel up their land for individuals to build homes, or if there is land for sale, it is in a very large parcel that most who are on the local school district's payroll can't afford unless their spouse has a substantially larger income. The towns are very small and often do not have many quality homes for sale. In my school district, our school owns a house that we allow a teacher to live in for a reduced rent rate. If administrators in small, remote, rural school districts could find a way to secure properties in their districts for their teachers to live, it could cut down on the problem of teachers facing a large commute. Administrators could also work with community members who have rentals to try to encourage the landlords to rent their homes out to teachers and serve as a liaison between the employees and the landlord to establish tenant relationships. As commutes are longer, the cost of getting to and from school each day can greatly affect the enticement of the school district salary. If a teacher is going to have to live in a larger town and commute, it often makes more sense to attempt to secure employment in the larger school district where the teacher lives.

An additional concern I encountered during my interviews and have personally faced is the need for adequate, nearby childcare. When I asked Participant J what he thought administrators in small, remote, rural schools could do to help retain teachers he said, "If you could open a daycare in the school that would help us. We have a two-year old, and the cost of a daycare is so high that it's almost not even worth me working almost. You could even have the high school go out and help with the babies, that would be great." Teachers with children who

are under school age are faced with the challenge of finding someone to keep their children where they are not having to drive an additional long distance out of their way. With the relatively lower salary teachers in small, remote, rural school receive, it is important they are able to afford the childcare.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, I hope to bring about positive change to my current school district by addressing issues related to teacher retention. I plan to seriously and proactively address teacher retention issues in this district by relying on some of the major research findings in this study. By sharing the results of this study with administrators in school districts similar to the one where I currently work, I think we can improve retention rates in small, remote, rural schools and continue to improve performance in these district systems as a whole. Indeed, there are factors of small, remote, rural schools that keeps teachers in their positions, despite relatively low teacher salaries. We must use these factors to our advantage and take a proactive approach to improve retention and keep our most loyal teachers satisfied in their teaching positions.

In the district where I currently work, we utilize a climate and culture survey and I believe something similar would allow administrators to measure the perceptions of teachers in their district regarding autonomy, administrator support, teacher voice, and fondness for position. The following questions would be useful in gathering information for district administrators to assess culture. The participants should answer each question using a Likert scale.

1. I enjoy coming to school.
2. I have friends at school.
3. I have a voice in district decisions.

4. I am supported by administrators.
5. I have autonomy to make decisions regarding instruction in my classroom.

The answers to these questions will provide administrators information about the culture in their district so they can begin to identify areas for improvement. I know from the data collected in this study that teachers value autonomy, supportive administration, and their relationships with their colleagues.

Participant A shared with me he came from larger school districts where he felt very isolated to his special education classroom and he told me there was an obvious separation. He shared the following about the value of the close relationships he feels in his current position at a small, remote, rural school:

I like being acquainted with [and] really knowing the entire faculty: the high school, the elementary, the entire staff. The closeness of that, the camaraderie, the willingness to help one another, is incredible and I think that's unique to a smaller school. And I mean it speaks of the people but it also speaks of of [*sic*] the nearness a smaller smaller [*sic*] educational environment.

To ensure teachers are not feeling isolated, prioritizing and scheduling things in the district where all faculty members can come together and have an opportunity to connect and build relationships with one another will be a priority. From staff survey data that was collected as part of the climate and culture survey mentioned before, teachers will annually leave comments that they wish there was more staff meetings because, while the campus is relatively small, the elementary teachers feel like they do not have enough opportunities to really spend time with the secondary teachers, and vice versa. Sometimes school schedules can get hectic and full so to ensure these events are being scheduled, it would be valuable for my leadership team to get together before the school year begins and set meetings for once a month where teachers can get together and quickly rendezvous before or after school. In the past I have had quick "ice

cream meetings” each quarter and almost all of our staff show up and enjoys the quick, fifteen-minute conversation and opportunity to connect.

To promote teacher autonomy, administrators can utilize professional development (PD) opportunities to allow teachers to personalize their growth and should consider finding ways to individualize professional learning as opposed to district wide PD initiatives. Participant J told me during his interview:

The professional development is not super important to me. Because ... I can find opportunities for professional development outside of [my current school district], so, there’s so many opportunities especially with online resources now that I don’t need my school to offer them. I can go find what I need elsewhere.

In my district, as opposed to a traditional “professional development plan” that the state requires each teacher to write and monitor, we write “Passion Project” plans. These Passion Projects serve as a way for teachers to dive into something specific they want to improve or learn more about regarding their instructional practices. These projects provide autonomy as administrators do not dictate what each teachers’ project will be, they simply serve as a sounding board and research consultant as teachers write their plans. Some of the projects we have seen implemented are project-based learning, home visits and family connections, and focusing on speaking and listening standards.

Once a teacher has identified an area where they want to improve, they find some research that shows the practice is beneficial to student growth, then they set goals and outline the steps they will take to reach those goals. During mid-year, and year-end evaluation meetings, the teachers bring evidence that shows their growth in their project and share with administration how they are seeing changes in their classroom and individual students. Our teachers seem to greatly appreciate these projects as opposed to a one-size fits all professional development approach that stifles their autonomy to grow in areas they personally identify.

Administrators can find ways to establish a culture of “servant leadership” within their school districts. In my school district, every year I share my personal mission statement. In my own opinion, a personal mission statement should fit on a t-shirt and be easy to remember. This is what I want them to think of when they see me and I strive to model this mission each and every day. My personal mission statement is, “Servant leadership and solid relationships.” I take a top-down approach to modeling this expectation of servant leadership and solid relationships in our building and hope that by modeling my work, it generates buy-in and my teachers also begin to prioritize these qualities and adopt a culture of servant leadership and prioritized relationships with all those within the school system: staff, students, parents, and patrons.

The participants in this study overwhelmingly shared a common fondness for their students and the relationships they have formed with their students and their students’ families.

Participant B shared:

It goes back to the support of the parents ... you know, you will still have the ones who may act up or whatever, but as soon as you get their parents in here, and you say, this is what is going on, then it’s like ‘OK, I will take care of this.’ and then it’s not an issue.

A key thing to note about Participant B’s statement is his willingness to personally communicate with this students’ parents. In my personal experience as an administrator, I can usually tell who is going to struggle with building relationships with parents and students and it is usually those teachers who are unwilling to call home, meet with parents, and openly discuss student progress. The participants in this study shared positive stories of their relationships with student families and they are all retaining their teaching position. Emphasis is placed on having mentors and veteran teachers talk to new teachers about the value of parent contact and how it lends ultimately to stronger family relationships. There is more that needs to be done in this area and if administrators can improve teacher confidence as it relates to parent contact, then teacher

to family relationships which will enhance the teacher's experience in their position can be improved. Some things I would like to implement are supported phone calls home where administrators can assist new teachers with tough phone calls home and model respectful conversations when dealing with a difficult topic. I want teachers to feel comfortable speaking to parents and building strong relationships. This usually begins with calling home on positive things students are doing and taking opportunities to visit with parents at school events like ball games and music concerts. These foundational conversations set the tone for a productive conversation when a teacher needs to call home over a discipline problem or academic issue.

Another strategy districts could implement would be having new teachers attend school events with a veteran teacher to model relationships building that takes place in the community. When I am supervising athletic events at my small, remote, rural school, I can often look around the gym and the district's strongest teachers, the teachers who have been in their positions the longest, are always in attendance. These teachers are moving throughout the crowd, interacting with parents, students, community members, and board members. They are friendly, smiling, and open to conversations. New teachers coming into these small districts can struggle if they are new to the community and do not know anyone. It can be intimidating to go up and speak to parents and patrons but if a veteran teacher is there with them, they can assist in introductions and model conversations and ways to interact.

If administrators are taking the time to help tackle barriers to successful teacher placement, they can improve retention. Administrators in small, remote, rural schools should take special interest in assisting new teachers find adequate housing they can afford within the community, and they should assist new teachers as they find their place in the community and

become truly assimilated. As teachers develop that strong sense of belonging, job satisfaction will increase due to feeling trusted, loved, and a valued part of the community.

It is reasonable to ask how administrators could be expected to take on this additional responsibility in addition to the many hats they already wear. In my district, we maintain a list of possible people in the district who might have rent homes available and when we have a teacher coming who has not found a home yet, we email our school board and they assist in reaching out to stakeholders in the community to see who might have a rental available. There are times there is nothing available in the district so I have used social media in the past to crowdsource my contacts and see what might be available in nearby communities. It would also be valuable to have a set of resources readily in hand during the hiring process that would outline for potential teachers where they could find rental homes or apartments within driving distance of the school.

The district directly to the north of the one where I work is larger, yet still considered a rural school district. We send our students there to the regional technical center and they have a district ran childcare center. The program serves as a lab for their technical center students and is available to their teachers. If a small, remote, rural school could open something similar, and provide a childcare program with priority given to teacher's children, it could serve as a method to combat the issue facing teachers as they often struggle to find childcare. The district would need to have an existing classroom with access to necessary restrooms and so the overhead cost of creating this program would be feasible. If the tuition for this program was reasonable, it would be attractive to individuals who work in the school as it would reduce commute and they could be close to their children during the day. I know we would not necessarily have enough children to fill the program just with teachers' children, but the program would also be a service to the community by providing openings to others who live within the district. My personal

children have had to switch daycare centers three times recently due to lack of a stable location and proximity to school. An in-district childcare program would be a welcome incentive to many working in small, remote, rural schools.

While it is not possible for many small, remote, rural schools to raise their salaries to compete with other area schools that are larger, efforts should be made to increase compensation when possible or provide opportunities for extra duties that can come with extra pay and enhance teacher salary. This study has found that despite low teacher pay, there are attributes in small, remote, rural schools that many teachers appreciate and prefer over moving to a larger district that pays more. As administrators get to know their faculty and build strong relationships among colleagues, they will be able to identify the specific needs of their teachers, provide them with support and increase the likelihood of retention.

There is a need to conduct further studies of small, remote, rural schools because their qualities are not identical to all other public schools. The findings of my study lend support and hope to leadership, such as myself, who are in small, remote, rural school districts facing the teacher shortage head on. Administrators in small, remote, rural school districts are not usually in the position of being able to feasibly raise salaries and, thinking this is the only way to improve retention, often find themselves in situations where they are constantly reacting to the constant revolving door of teachers instead of proactively dealing with the retention issue at hand. It is important to identify the strong, non-monetary factors that are keeping teachers in the district and capitalize on their worth.

There are proactive measures administrators in small, remote, rural schools can do to better retain teachers. By prioritizing relationships, providing specialized support for teachers, and small class sizes, districts can capitalize on the attributes many teachers appreciate in the

teaching profession. As culture within districts improves to allow for improved bonds between student families and teachers, teacher job satisfaction will improve and teachers will be more likely to retain their teaching positions.

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Appendix A

Table 11

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Possible Root Hygiene Causes Contributing to a Teacher Accepting a Position

Salary

A feeling of community – interpersonal relations

A schedule that accommodates life style

Ability to provide for family

Working conditions

Table 12

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Possible Root Motivation Causes Contributing to a Teacher Staying in their Position

A feeling of a “calling”

A sense of purpose

Opportunity for growth

Appendix B: Open Ended Questions for Teacher Interviews

1. What is your position title in your school district?
2. How long have you served in your position?
3. Why did you choose to teach in your school district?

Questions if they are remaining in the district the following year:

4. Which attribute did you choose as most influential in choosing to continue teaching in a small, remote, rural school district? (Provide a list of the attributes they were shown during the survey.)

- a. Why did you choose that attribute?
- b. Were there other attributes close to “most influential” in your ranking?

5. Which attribute did you choose as least influential in choosing to teach in a small, remote, rural school district?

- a. Why did you choose that attribute?
- b. Were there other factors close to “least influential” in your ranking?

Questions if they are leaving their position:

6. Which attribute did you choose as most influential in choosing to leave your position in a small, remote, rural school district? (Provide a list of the attributes they were shown during the survey.)

- a. Why did you choose that attribute?
 - b. Were there other attributes close to “most influential” in your ranking?
7. Which attribute did you choose as least influential in choosing to leave your position in a small, remote, rural school district?
- a. Why did you choose that attribute?
 - b. Were there other factors close to “least influential” in your ranking?

Questions for All:

8. What do you like about teaching in a small, rural school district?
9. What would you change about teaching in a small, rural school district?
10. What factors do you think are present in a small, rural school that are different from a larger school district?
11. What do you think administrators could do to encourage teachers to continue working in small, remote, rural schools?

Appendix C: Qualtrics Survey

11/4/21, 9:55 AM

Qualtrics Survey Software

Beginning Questions

Consent for Participation in Online Survey Research

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: Teacher Retention and Turnover in Small, Remote, Rural Schools in Missouri

Name of Principal Researcher: Jordan Dickey

Name of Faculty Advisor: Kevin Brady, Ph.D.

Purpose and Background: You have been invited to participate in an individual teacher survey by Jordan Dickey, principal researcher. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors within small, remote, rural school districts in Southwest Missouri that contribute to teacher retention. This study will also investigate the factors in these school systems that lead to teacher attrition and turnover. The survey will be a time to reflect on attributes contributing to decisions to retain teaching positions in small, remote rural schools, or leave them. The information collected at this time will be used to determine the strategies school districts should focus on to improve teacher retention. This survey, if you decide to participate, will be approximately 15-30 minutes in length.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Discontinue: My participation in this survey is voluntary and if I decide not to participate in the study, or withdraw from the study at any time, including exiting from the electronic survey, I will not be penalized. I have the right to not answer any questions which make me uncomfortable or to end my participation in the survey altogether, at any time, by exiting the survey. No one from my school district or the University of Arkansas will be told. I am aware that participants typically spend 15-30 minutes completing the survey which consists of multiple choice and free-response questions.

Risks and Benefits: I understand this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects at the University of Arkansas. There are no foreseen risks to those participating in this survey. By participating in this survey you will be contributing to the existing research teacher retention in small, remote rural schools.

Confidentiality: All responses to the electronic survey will be kept confidential such that your individual survey responses will not be personally identifiable. No identifying information, including your email address, will be used in the written transcription of this study and will not be collected. Data collected in this study will be stored on a password protected cloud-storage service for use only by the principal researcher. Prospective use of data will adhere to standard data use policies which de-identify individuals and institutions. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

Questions:

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction.

For further information or questions, please contact:

Jordan Dickey, Principal Researcher: jdickey@bronaugh.k12.mo.us or jedickey@uark.edu

Dr. Kevin Brady, Faculty Advisor: kpbrady@uark.edu

For questions or concerns about your rights as a researcher participant, please contact the University of Arkansas IRB by email at irb@uark.edu, by phone 479-575-2208, or on campus.

Informed Consent: I understand that by clicking agree, I voluntarily agree to participate in this survey. I consent to the terms of my participation in this study and I will be directed to the survey questions.

Agree

Did you attend school in the district in which you currently work?

11/4/21, 9:55 AM

Qualtrics Survey Software

 Yes No

At the time you are taking this survey, do you intend to remain in your current teaching position for the 2022-23 school year?

 Yes No

Questions in staying in position

Rank the attributes in order from "most influential" to "least influential" as they relate to your decision to STAY in your position in a small, remote rural school.

Medical benefits

Retirement benefits

Salary

Annual Raises

Commute time to work

Distance to the closest town with access to groceries, restaurants, medical care, etc

The size of your class

Supportive school administration

Opportunity to give input on school-wide decisions

Availability of sufficient textbooks and school materials for class

Up-to-date technology at school

Clean and Safe school facilities

The academic performance of students at the school

The degree of parental involvement in children's education at the school

11/4/21, 9:55 AM

Qualtrics Survey Software

Relationships with colleagues

Your ability to be an effective teacher

Work schedule that provides for summers off

The teacher licensure requirements

Ongoing professional development to help with teaching students

Which attribute did you choose as most influential in your decision to STAY in your current teaching position and why?

Is there anything additional you would like to share about working in a small, remote, rural school?

Questions if Leaving Position

Why are you leaving your current teaching position?

- To seek a position in another school district
- To seek a different position in my current school district.
- To seek a position in a field other than education.
- To stay home with children.

11/4/21, 9:55 AM

Qualtrics Survey Software

 Retirement

Rank the attributes in order from "most influential" to "least influential" as they relate to your decision to LEAVE your position in a small, remote rural school.

Medical benefits

Retirement benefits

Salary

Annual Raises

Commute time to work

Distance to the closest town with access to groceries, restaurants, medical care, etc

The size of your class

Lack of support from school administration

Lack of opportunity to give input on school-wide decisions

Lack of availability of sufficient textbooks and school materials for class

Lack of up-to-date technology at school

Unclean and unsafe school facilities

The academic performance of students at the school

The degree of parental involvement in children's education at the school

Relationships with colleagues

Your ability to be an effective teacher

Work schedule

The teacher licensure requirements

Lack of professional development for working with students

11/4/21, 9:55 AM

Qualtrics Survey Software

Which option did you choose as most influential in your decision to leave your current position and why?

Is there anything additional you would like to share about working in a small, remote, rural school?

Powered by Qualtrics

Appendix D: IRB Approval



To: Jordan Elizabeth Dickey
From: Justin R Chimka, Chair
IRB Expedited Review
Date: 12/23/2021
Action: **Exemption Granted**
Action Date: 12/23/2021
Protocol #: 2110366831
Study Title: Teacher Retention and Turnover in Small, Remote, Rural Schools in Missouri

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Kevin P Brady, Investigator